

PLANE

SCAPETM

DELUXE ADVENTURE
& ACCESSORY



HELLBOUND:

THE BLOOD WAR



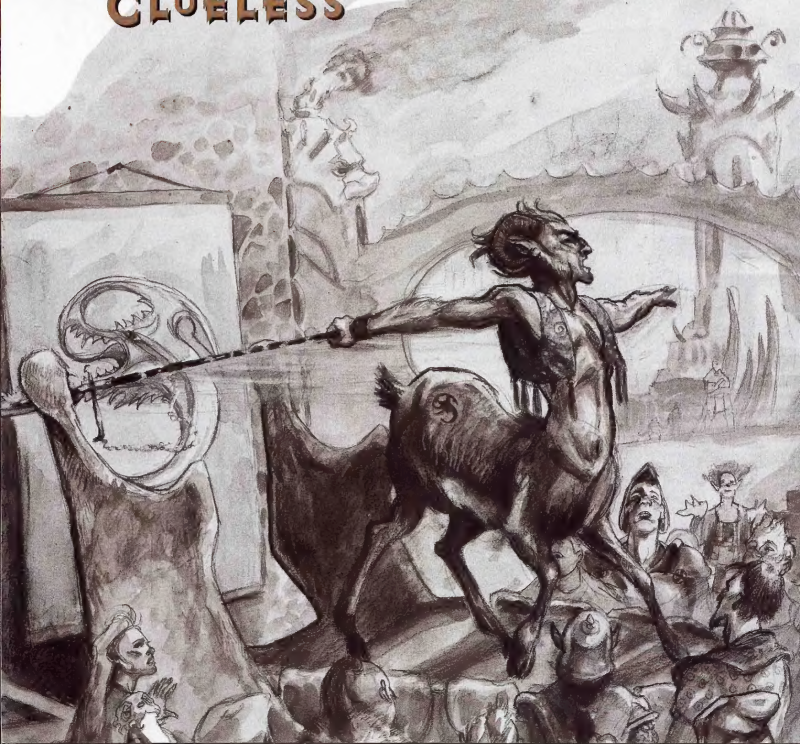
THE
CHANT
OF THE
WAR

A Player's Guide ♦

This first chapter is intended for primes, also called the Clueless. Primes're player characters who hail from the Prime-Material Plane, folks who've not yet marveled at the full glories of the multiverse. The chant here fills 'em in on everything they need to know about the Blood War. 'Course, planars can read this chapter, too; it's just assumed that characters born and bred on the planes *already* know the information.

Because the chant was collected from a variety of planar sources, all with their own axes to grind, it's possible that a few inaccuracies've crept in here and there. A body shouldn't rely on it to pull his fat out of the fire too often. Most of the time the information'll save his life, but one day it might let him down.

CHANT FOR THE CLUELESS



◆ WELCOME ♦♦ THE WAR ◆

One of the most important mistakes a prime can make is just that: thinking he can make an important mistake. He can't. Sure, he can irritate some high-ups, and get himself put in the dead-book real easy. He can steal the hammer of Thor . . . well, at least he can give it a try. He can kill off a pit fiend and try to storm the fortress of Malsheem.


But is any of this important? No. A mortal can make precious little difference in the Blood War. It's too big, been going on too long. The most lasting impact a body can hope to have is — maybe, just maybe — to become a tiny little footnote in the annals of the war. But even that's something that powerful heroes, paladins and wizards and the like, haven't done in eons. It's that hard.

Now, with that said, is anyone discouraged? Any berks want to get up and go?

All right. For those who've stayed, let me give you some basic tips on the war. But don't think I can share the full dark of it with you. You'll find out the real secrets as you get better in your trade — whatever it is. Just remember: Life on the planes is about belief and knowledge. If you expect everything to be handed to you on a silver platter like it is on the Prime, well, you've got a good deal to learn, and you probably ain't going to like most of it. But if you've got enough moxie to make it this far, you might stay out of the dead-book — for a while, anyway.

— Altus Timblespiver, Indep guide, trying to explain the Blood War to a group of Clueless





Most berks think that the Blood War's nothing more than the battle between dem— no, wait. That ain't the right word. For one thing, it's a sure road to woe. Calling the fiends by the d-words is no better than insulting any other group of folks because of the way they look or act. Not only does it infuriate them, it marks the speaker as a crass boor, someone to be shunned (or killed). Might as well call a bariaur a randy goat, or a slaad a slimy toad. It's mark of ignorance, plain and simple, and it'll paint a body to be as Clueless as they come.

When speaking of the evil creatures that fight the Blood War, just call them "baatezu" (bay-AH-teh-zoo) and "tanar'ri" (tuh-NAHR-ee), or "the fiends."

Or call them nothing at all; that way, a body's not as likely to draw their attention.

Now, then: Most berks think the Blood War's nothing more than the millennia-old battle between the tanar'ri and the baatezu. (For those who don't know, the tanar'ri are the chaotic fiends, and the baatezu the lawful ones.) But the war's about so much more than that. It's not just a squabble that a body can avoid by keeping out of the Lower Planes — there's almost *nowhere* in the multiverse a sod can hide to give the war the laugh. The fighting permeates everything; entire societies rise and fall around the tides of the war. It reaches from the pits of Baator — that's the Nine Hells, to most Clueless — to the heights of the Mount Celestia — that's the Seven Heavens — and stains every plane in between.

Frightening, eh? That's what most planars think, too. But the Blood War's been a part of their existence for so long that they'd almost be lost without it. It's been a backdrop not only of *their* lives, but also the lives of their ancestors all the way back to before there *were* ancestors. Imagine having the sun disappear. It's something every prime takes for granted, something that's been around since before anyone can remember. And then suddenly it's gone. What's a sod to do then? How does he make peace with the disappearance of something integral to his view of the world and the cosmos?

That's how important the Blood War is to the stability of the planes. If it were to vanish, it'd leave a gaping hole in its place. And, no doubt, new cutters would spring forth to fill that void, and the multiverse'd probably be plunged into war again. Cynical? Maybe. But most folks hate change. When it looms, they usually do their level best to return things to the way they were before — even when dealing with something as horrible as the Blood War.

THE NATURE OF ◆ THE FIENDS ◆

The fiends've lived for far longer than most any Clueless can appreciate. It's easy to imagine a millennium or two, years multiplying into decades and centuries. Now think of that as the time it takes for a body to draw one breath. Think a prime-material empire's lasted a long time? It's only a blink of an eye for the fiends. They claim that mortal existence barely spans any time at all for them, and who's to say otherwise?

All the while, the baatezu and tanar'ri have hated each other. That's no secret. Fact is, chant says their mutual revulsion goes back to the very first time the races met — powers only know when *that* was. So they've had a bit of time to stew about their anger, countless years to plot traps and schemes, far too long for general devilry and evil. Even the tanar'ri lay plans — just because they're chaotic doesn't mean they're stupid. The best way for a fiend to look out for itself is to stay one step ahead of its opponents. That means any mortals who get involved had better watch out; chances are, the fiends'll welcome the opportunity to turn their plans into reality, to sink their plots into flesh. Only the very sharpest mortals have a hope of escaping, and not even they pull it off all the time.

The baatezu, especially, wait years to capitalize on a deal. They've been around this long; what's another century, let alone another decade? Sure, they act when the situation calls for it, but they far prefer to weave schemes until they hardly need to act at all. The tanar'ri are too passionate, too hot-headed, to be that patient. They don't like to savor their vengeance over the years; they want it all at once.

Chant is that the yugoloths — a third group of lower-planar fiends — act only in order to grab themselves a piece of the pie. When they scheme, it's to amass power, jink, or both. Most graybeards say that the mercenary yugoloths have no real interest in the Blood War, other than in how they can line their pockets at the expense of the baatezu and tanar'ri. It's no dark that they sometimes use mortals in their endless money-grubbing plots.

An attentive berk'll note how often the words "fiend" and "scheme" are used together. See, not all the battles of the Blood War rely on swords and spells. On the Outer Planes, belief is everything, and an army that puts on a good show of bluff and bluster can drive its enemy away without ever crossing blades once.



Truth is, a single well-placed word can push an entire troop, an entire town, or an entire layer of a plane over the philosophical edge. As long as the word's passed along and spread around, like a disease, it can have more power than the might of a million fiends. The baatezu and tanar'ri clash for more than just territory; they fight for the hearts and minds of every sod on the Outer Planes. Belief is power, and the fiends who best manipulate the beliefs of the planes can rule the multiverse.



ANY FÖE
OF THE TANAR'RI IS A
FRIEND OF MINE.



— SWÖRL,
A HÖUND ARCHÖN
OF MÖUNT CELESTIA

much as possible to make themselves rich beyond their wildest dreams. Oddly enough, many celestials want to keep the Blood War going, too, so that the fiends'll weaken each other enough for the armies of light to fly in and conquer evil once and for all.

The slaadi and the modrons are in the war to see the triumph of, respectively, chaos and law. Any berk who can help them meet that goal is a potential ally; any berk who can't (or worse, won't) is a foe to be crushed. At least, that's the modron way of thinking. The slaadi aren't quite as predictable; they do what they like. But no matter what they do, chaos seems to result. Their sheer randomness keeps them pure.

◆ MOVERS AND SHAKERS ◆

Asking who's involved in the Blood War is like asking how many stars fill the sky — it's an impossible question, but one with an easy answer: All of 'em. Who's involved in the Blood War? Everyone.

From the obvious players (the baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths) to the less obvious (the celestials, like archons and aasimon) to the nearly inexplicable (the modrons and the slaadi), everyone who's anyone on the Outer Planes has a hand in the Blood War. It's too big an issue for any of them to ignore it.

Why? Well, the Blood War isn't just a battle between two evil races. It's a struggle for the control of evil itself, for the definition of what true evil really is. The baatezu represent law, the tanar'ri chaos — two of the most primal forces of the multiverse — and the clash of fiends is really a war to determine which is the right belief, which will now and ever more hold sway.

Those who can get past the simple straitjackets of good and evil, who cast the Blood War as law versus chaos, often end up fighting on one side or the other. Indeed, the strangest thing about the war is that it makes allies of the most unlikely parties. The lawful archons and modrons have been known to work with the baatezu, neutral aasimon occasionally aid the yugoloths, and chaotic aasimon and slaadi come down on the side of the tanar'ri. These other races have specific interests in the war that dwarf their own personal hatred for fiends, and they team up with their mortal enemies to accomplish those ends. 'Course, once the goals are reached, coalitions dissolve as if they'd never existed; the temporary allies once again work at cross-purposes.

As for the goals themselves, they're as different as night and day. The baatezu and tanar'ri, obviously, do their best to annihilate each other — they see genocide as the only solution to their problems. The yugoloths are along to make some jink; chant is that they want to prolong the war as

BAA+LEGROUND ◆ OF BLOOD ◆

As noted earlier, the Blood War rages across all the planes of existence. However, certain spots — mainly, the Lower Planes — feel the sting of the fighting more keenly.

Getting to the war is, unfortunately, easy. Plenty of portals in Sigil, the City of Doors, drop a planewalker smack in the middle of the worst of it. And there's always the River Styx, which flows through the Lower Planes. A body who sails its waters'd better take the right forks and catch the right eddies; otherwise, he might well find himself in the midst of an incredible battle, or fighting for his life in the lowest layers of a hostile plane. The river helps keep the war raging; without it, the fiends'd find it harder to get their claws on each other.

'Course, dangerous as they are, the big battlegrounds draw the most interest. Clashes there bring a quickening to the blood, and news of the frays strike fear into the hearts of denizens across the multiverse. These are the primary planes of contention, the deadly fields of violence.

BAA+ÖR (BAY-AH-+ÖR)

The home of the baatezu and the plane of law and evil, Baator consists of nine layers, stacked like an inverted mountain. The ninth layer is unreachable except by heroic effort; the other eight are nearly unlivable. A body traveling there needs sharp steel and sharper wits.

Baator's one of the most important sites in the Blood War. It's from there that the baatezu launch their attacks across the Great Ring, and from there that they plot the best ways to destroy their hereditary enemies. See, the baatezu are creatures of rigid structure and order. They usually don't attack unless provoked, but a cutter's still advised to watch his back at all times — and to watch his tongue even more

so. The baatezu love to take words and twist their meanings, so that they get the best end of every bargain.

The lower baatezu are more disorderly than their betters; it's the rituals of promotion that purge the traces of chaos from their bodies. They're a bit easier to best in combat or wordplay, but they're still leagues tougher than most any mortal can handle.

GEHENNA (GE-HEN-UH)

More vile than Baator, Gehenna's been losing ground to both the baatezu's plane and its other neighbor — the Gray Waste — for years. It's commonly thought to be the smallest of all Outer Planes in actual physical size. Gehenna has four layers, though folks who've been there usually refer to them as the four furnaces. A plane of volcanoes and magma, Gehenna's viewed mainly as a mustering ground for baatezu and a skirmishing ground for tanar'ri who make it this far.

The yugoloths, the treacherous mercenaries of the Blood War, also make their home on Gehenna. A cutter with enough jink might be able to hire himself a 'loth guide or bodyguard, but they don't come cheap. Besides, it usually takes more than money to get 'em to agree to anything.

THE GRAY WASTE

The Gray Waste is by far the most popular battleground for the baatezu and tanar'ri, in part because it's the midpoint of the Lower Planes. The three layers (or glooms, as they're called) of the Waste leech life and color from anyone and anything that goes there. But the plane's said to hold the key to winning the Blood War. 'Course,

not a sage alive today seems to know what that key is, but the fiends fight over the Waste nevertheless.

Because the plane is considered the very nadir of evil, the interfering celestials of the Upper Planes like to go there to wreak their own havoc. It's strange that a place that fosters apathy would be so fiercely contested.

CARCERI (KAR-SEHR-EE)

Carceri is the home of the gehreleths — a small race of hateful fiends. It's a prison for anyone else. The six-layered plane is said to look like a great string of beads. The Red Prison, as it's called, serves the same purpose as Gehenna in the scheme of the war. It's the midpoint between the Gray Waste and the Abyss, a mustering ground for tanar'ri warriors and the final resting place for baatezu soldiers lucky enough to make it this far.

The sods unlucky enough to live on Carceri full-time have chips on their shoulders the size of Sigil. They can't leave the plane, and they don't take kindly to anyone who can come and go as he pleases. Carceri is a brutal proving ground, and most folks give it a wide berth.

THE ABYSS

The Abyss is said to hold infinite layers and infinite evil, but that chant might just be tanar'ri rattling their bone-boxes to scare folks. However, it's a fact that the plane is big — *really* big. In the chaos that poisons the land, it's hard to tell where one layer ends and another begins, and all ground is up for grabs in the constant power struggles of the Abyssal lords.



The contested Lower Planes: Baator, Gehenna, the Gray Waste, Carceri, and the Abyss.

The many forms of tanar'ri spring up from the Abyss. Their burning hatred and rage seems born from the very plane itself; they've got to be tough to survive the horrors of their home. Any sod planning to visit the Abyss should know that the tanar'ri are capricious and cruel. The baatezu may like to twist words, but the tanar'ri like to twist necks. They're killers, plain and simple, and they do what they want, when they want, and to whoever they want.

THE REST OF THE PLANES

Though they're not the main battlegrounds, other planes still play roles in the Blood War. For example, the Outlands see almost constant traffic of fiendish warriors. Baatorian and Abyssal armies march across the land in hopes of catching their enemies unaware, each looking to make a furious sneak attack on the home plane of the other. The Astral Plane plays a role much like that of the Outlands — it connects the top layers of the Outer Planes, and is a handy method of travel.

The good-aligned Upper Planes spawn fanatical fighters prepared to give their all to combat the rise of evil. From Arcadia to Arborea, the forces of light align to prevent the fiends from having their way with the multiverse.

Only two planes are wholly free of the taint of good or evil: Mechanus, the home of the lawful modrons, and Limbo, the pond of the chaotic slaadi. These planes breed soldiers who believe only that law or chaos is the absolute and the ideal. The modrons aid the baatezu, the slaadi help the tanar'ri, and neither race has any dealings with the other side (though it's hard to say that for sure with the slaadi). The fiends usually welcome the supplies and reinforcements.

◆ THE CLASSES ◆

Naturally, folks of different walks of life are going to lean different ways about the Blood War. A body can't help but be influenced by his choice of profession — it can open or close doors to smiting evil, earning jink, or just making a name for himself. This section outlines how people of various classes feel about the war.

'Course, not everyone who falls under a certain group'll parrot the same line about the Blood War. The PCs are individuals, and shouldn't feel constrained to follow what others in their classes think.

I'US+ BECAUSE
I'M A FANATIC
DOESN'+ MEAN I'M STUPID.

— THE PALADIN
BLANDER MUL,
REFUSING +0 FIGHT
IN THE BLOOD WAR

FIGHTERS

The Blood War's a godsend to any bruiser willing to sell his sword. Both the baatezu and the tanar'ri are always on the lookout for mercenaries, and the celestials likewise swell their ranks with skilled warriors. But only the best need apply. A body's got no business wading into the fighting until he's powerful enough to take care of himself. For some, that day never comes, while others seem to think they're ready the minute they buckle on a blade.

A fighter can also try to make his living as a fortune hunter, raiding fiend palaces and secret storehouses to "liberate" as much jink as he can. Naturally, first he's got to smuggle the booty past all the fiends and their allies before they realize it's missing. But the staggering amount of coins, gems, and arcane magical items on the Lower Planes makes it worth the risk.

Finally, some bashers want to fight just so they can say that they've "been there, done that." They know that the Blood War's a no-win situation, but it serves quite well as a testing ground, a place to get noticed by the right high-ups. These kinds of fighters just focus on making it through their first battle, fully intent to walk away when done — only leatherheads stick around for more.

PALADINS

Paladins and the Blood War — an explosive combination, if ever there was one. Paladins are, by nature, fanatics. They've devoted themselves to an ideal and a god, all in the service of law and good.



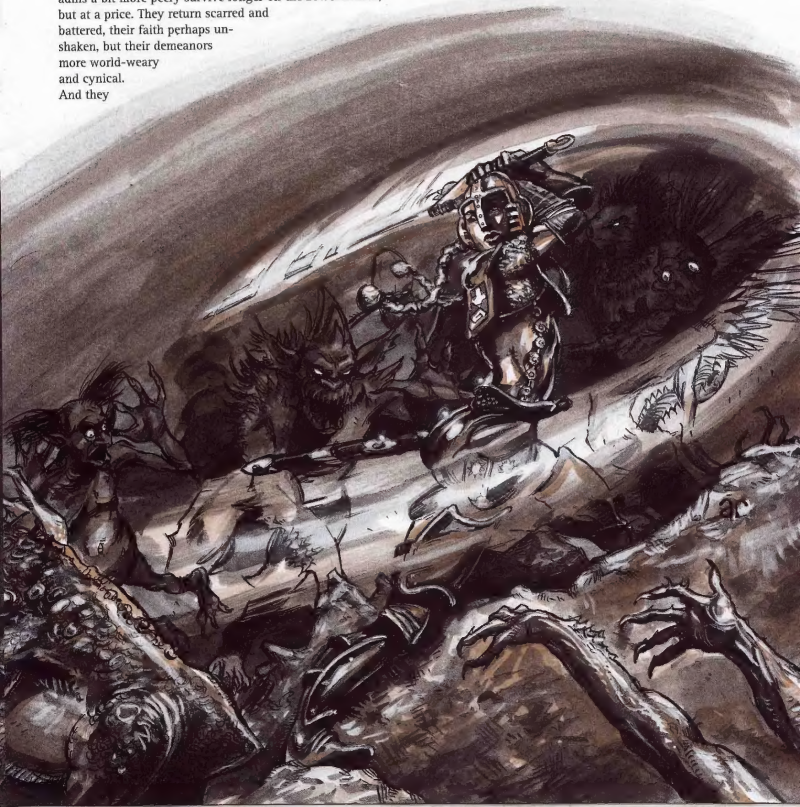
And the Blood War — with its rank fiends and perversions — is the antithesis of all that, the gathering of all a paladin hates the most.

Thus, most paladins of the Outer Planes ride spitting and frothing into the battlefields of the war, sure that their faith will sustain them in their hours of need. Sadly, the berks often fall before they've been a day on the Lower Planes, their powers failing in the bastions of hate and evil.

The trick is to not charge the fiends like lightning and thunder, but to act with subtlety and careful thought. Paladins a bit more peery survive longer on the Lower Planes, but at a price. They return scarred and battered, their faith perhaps unshaken, but their demeanors more world-weary and cynical. And they

rarely have such a burning fervor to take the war to the fiends again.

It's not unusual for a driven young paladin to take leave of his friends and venture into fiend-held lands, only to stride (or stagger) back a few months or years later. Some tell tales of might and valor, while others whisper of the pains of fiendish prison camps. Either way, paladins do the most good by rescuing poor, innocent sods who've gotten caught up in the war or captured by vile forces.



RANGERS

A ranger's reaction to the Blood War really depends on what plane he calls home. Some, far removed from the fighting, see the war as an unstoppable (and necessary) process of nature, and don't give it much more thought.

Course, it's hard to hold such tenets when the fiends are close enough to smell, when they tear up the fabric of reality and crush nature in their paths, when they routinely slaughter any sods they encounter, when they defile a plane with their very presence. Most rangers don't accept that the baatezu and tanar'ri just fulfill their natural roles. They claim that the fiends are the most *unnatural* beings that've ever lived, and devote their lives to saving the multiverse from the monsters' destructive rampages.

Taking the fight to the fiends' home planes is risky; no ranger'll ever get in tune with Baator as much as a baatezu can. Many choose instead to defend their homeland (or other vulnerable places) against fiendish invasion. The more pastoral planes usually have hereditary defenders, but chances are they'd like nothing more than to have the aid of a ranger. Most such cutters are welcome wherever they go on the Upper Planes; the Outlands are favorable to rangers as well.

WIZARDS

Most wizards (whether mages or specialists) look on the Blood War as a boon — at least, most of the adventuresome wizards do. After all, the pursuit of magic is what makes them take to the road in the first place. And the war is an excellent place to learn and hone the wizardly arts — especially to acquire new spells. It's said that some baatezu and tanar'ri keep spellbooks whose pages drip with powerful, forbidden magic.

Wizards who stay at home tend to see the Blood War as reprehensible and wasteful (though others sneer that they're just jealous because they can't get to it).

Sure, it's an opportunity for learning, but the true path is to learn under their own merits, not the aegis of the fiends.

A few wizards take a middle tack, and choose merely to study the war's excesses and combatants.

Fact is, any given Blood War battle's likely to have its share of wizardly observers, each hoping to learn something new.

Certain groups and schools even try to steal



bodies of fallen fiends for dissection and study. Some want the organs for spell components, others want to learn how to defeat the fiends in battle, and some are just plain curious.

A wizard from the planes has a unique advantage over his prime-material counterparts. While primes struggle with incantations and sigils to summon and bind fiends, bartering their spirits for riches or power, a planar can go directly to the source. If he's canny enough to approach a fiend at the right time and make the right offer, he might walk away with new spells and magical items.

Naturally, a fiend'll throw a few catches into the bargain. For example, it might hand out a magical dagger that only works against its racial enemies — and that's a best-case scenario. At worst, an item might bond to the user and drag his unwilling spirit to the Lower Planes to serve as cannon fodder in the Blood War.

PRIESTS

When it comes to priests, their opinions of the Blood War are as varied as the critters of the Beastlands. A handful — particularly the priests of war gods — enjoy the fighting a bit *too* much, leading bands of followers into fruitless raids against the fiends and their strongholds. As they venture farther from their gods' realms, their power diminishes, but that rarely dims the zeal of fanatical priests.

They're the exception, though. Most priests steer clear of the war, recognizing it as one of the eternal fixtures of the planes. The more honest readily confess that they avoid the war simply because their gods can't grant success in the contested planes — at least, not the kind that they're accustomed to.

Press a priest hard, though, and he'll admit that the Blood War is precisely the kind of metaphysical conflict that drove him to don robes in the first place. It typifies the struggle of law and chaos, good and evil, that brings the truly devoted into the folds of their deities. Fact is, the existence of many priests is defined by the Blood War.

Despite how a priest might feel about the war, he's always in the vanguard when his power decides to send a batch of followers to the fighting. As the spiritual representative of his god, he generally leaps to fill the need. Other times, a priest feels called to the Blood War in order to study the enemies (or, in some cases, allies) of his power. Though he's rarely commanded to do so, a priest'll usually make the journey to gain a fuller understanding of the forces behind the battles.

In essence, a priest is free to follow his own desires regarding the Blood War. But when his god calls, the cutter'd

better answer. Few powers are totally ambivalent about the war (or the fiends), and they all expect their priests to toe the company line.

ROGUES

Rogues may well have the easiest time of it in the Blood War. They've got so many options, a single rogue'd be hard-pressed to try them all. 'Course, that's partly because some of those options are deadly, even suicidal, and most rogues aren't so blinded by the promise of treasure as to risk life, limb, and sanity — *most* rogues, that is.

A thief can get rich fast in the war, if he plays his cards right. The tanar'ri might hire him to steal battle plans from the baatezu, the baatezu might pay him to bring false plans back to the tanar'ri, and the yugoloths might reward him to double-cross both sides. Every party in the war can use a thief's larcenous touch. Whether they trust him or not is another story.

What's more, the war's so full of mortals already that a thief can insinuate himself in most anywhere. He can slip close enough to a gabby lieutenant to pick up a few choice secrets, or creep into the enemies' tent and slit throats as they sleep, or filch an important piece of magic from the vault of a commander.

Bards, too, can make a good living as heralds, envoys, or diplomats — a fiend general would much rather send a slick-talking mortal to deliver a message than risk the life of an "important" soldier in its unit. And plenty of high-ups like to keep bards around, just so they can spin tales of the leader's greatness.

But a rogue's got to watch his back. Fiends are masters of deception. What's more, they've been peeled enough times to know better than to trust a mortal rogue. They'll

watch a berk carefully, ready to devour him the minute he blows his cover or tosses off the wrong remark.

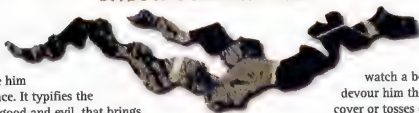
The tanar'ri in particular make bad bosses; they'll slay a body at the slightest provocation.

◆ A WORD TO THE WISE ◆

This chapter doesn't give near enough chant for a sod to navigate the Blood War. But it's a good start for any Clueless looking to get a handle on things. A body who wants more'll just have to dig it out on his own.

Really, though, knowledge ain't worth a tailor's stitch if it's not backed up by solid experience. And sitting here isn't going to accomplish a thing. Go and learn.

HMM . . .
WHA+ RHYMES WITH "PUS+ULAN+?"
— LLEWELLYN, A BARD,
COMPOSING A SONG ABOUT HIS
BALOR COMMANDER



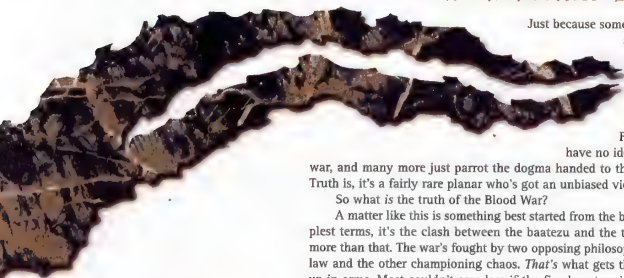
This chapter is intended for planars, player characters who're native to the planes. Having spent their lives with the Blood War as a backdrop, planars naturally know more than primes about the conflict. What's more, the variety of new races and factions help give a slant to a planar's views.

Players of prime-material characters should *not* read this chapter right away. Wait until the characters have adventured on the planes long enough to learn who's who and what's what — until they're no longer considered Clueless. Come back and read this chapter then.

As with the chant for the Clueless, the information below is not necessarily accurate. On the Outer Planes, a body's got to be careful about what beliefs he holds near and dear to his heart.

CHANT FOR PLANARS

◆ A NECESSARY EVIL ◆



Just because some planars know more about the Blood War than primes do, does that mean that *all* planars are experts on the matter? Hardly. Plenty of planar sods have no idea of the dark of the

war, and many more just parrot the dogma handed to them by their factoids. Truth is, it's a fairly rare planar who's got an unbiased view of the war at all.

So what is the truth of the Blood War?

A matter like this is something best started from the beginning. In its simplest terms, it's the clash between the baatezu and the tanar'ri, yes, but it's more than that. The war's fought by two opposing philosophies, one espousing law and the other championing chaos. *That's* what gets the rest of the planes up in arms. Most couldn't care less if the fiends exterminated each other. In fact, they're glad it's happening — it makes the multiverse safer as a whole.

Even more, the Blood War is an event that weighs heavily on the multiverse. It's dragged on for so long, the very nature of the Outer Planes reflects its influence. Chant is that the war's raged since before the first humanoid sod ever crawled out of the muck, and it's likely to be around after the last one's dead. The war's even dragged in the celestials, the modrons, and the slaadi, each race with its own agenda. The celestials want to see the fiends obliterate each other, preferably dragging the treacherous yugoloths down as well. The modrons want nothing less than the imposition of law across the whole multiverse. The slaadi, agents of chaos, don't really seem to want much of anything, and they inadvertently foster the ends of chaos just by following their own whims.

Entire societies and economies revolve around the Blood War. It's so big that even the baatezu and tanar'ri can't supply themselves entirely. They already rely on outside dealers for food and weapons, and they're always looking for mercenaries, spies, couriers, and the like. Some cities across the planes regularly get rich or go broke, depending on the tides of battle and the rise and fall of one side or another.

The war's become such an integral part of the Outer Planes that any major change in its fortunes shakes the very foundations of existence. Folks alive today have always lived in the shadow of the war. They don't know if it'll swallow them up any time soon, but they can't ignore it, either. To some, it's a blessing and a godsend, for it means life, glory, and honor, *not* to mention the chance to make a fast pile of jink. To others, it's the destruction of

THE WAR'S
GOT ITS FLAWS,
BUT IT'S GREAT
FOR BUSINESS!

— ARAM OAKWRIGHT,
MEMBER OF THE FATED



everything they know, the inevitable sword that'll one day fall across the neck of creation.

But they also know there's little they can do about it. No one expects the Blood War to end. It's just a fact of life, like the Spire on the Outlands and Sigil floating above it. The fighting is constant, and the sods just go about their lives as best they know how. They're survivors.

◆ THE RACES ◆

A body's race is one of the most important factors in his outlook on the war (assuming that he was brought up to cherish his culture's ideals). Likes, dislikes, loves, prejudices — a sod's wrapped in his racial attitudes like a caterpillar in a cocoon. This section outlines the general attitudes put forth by the major player character races of the planes. As with the views of the character classes (in "Chant for the Clueless"), the information isn't meant to force a PC down any particular path. Each character can decide for himself what to think.

BARIAUR

The typical wandering bariaur tribe despises the baatezu and tanar'ri. They see the fiends as creatures of unrepentant evil who exist solely to prey on the weak and helpless. Bariaur are a carefree bunch, but they don't much care for bullies who enforce their will by beating or enslaving others.

As for the Blood War itself, the bariaur tend to side with the forces of chaos. They're too free-spirited to accept the rigidity of law that the baatezu seek to impose on the multiverse. Bariaur believe that the cosmos would smother under a heavy blanket of conformity.

That doesn't mean they're going to run off to the Abyss and enlist with the tanar'ri. Fiends are fiends, and neither side is worth fighting for. In a dire, life-or-death pinch, the bariaur'd eventually settle on helping the tanar'ri, though it'd leave a foul taste in their mouths and they'd quit as soon as the forces of chaos got back in the saddle.

As a nonchalance race, the bariaur care little if one of their own decides to take part in the struggle.

If a body wants to go rot in the Gray Waste, more power to him — but he shouldn't expect much help from the rest of the herd.

'Course, a few bariaur have made names for themselves along the way. As long as they return untainted, they're welcomed.

BE++ER +@ BE CARESSED
BY CHA@S
+HAN S+RANGLED BY LAW.
— BARIAUR PROVERB

GI+HZERAI

The humorless githzerai of Limbo have little use for the Blood War. They've got their own problems: fighting off slaadi incursions, maintaining homes in the ever-shifting soup of their plane, and defending against the constant githyanki raiders. Still, the war's not something they can easily ignore. For the most part, githzerai stick to an isolationist policy and just watch from the sidelines. They don't want to involve their race in yet another imbroglio — their current fights are quite enough to keep them busy.

Some of the githzerai elders believe that the forces of chaos should be controlled, brought to heel — in essence, made to obey laws. Others, more wanton, go so far as to suggest that the race follow the lead of the slaadi and offer troops to the tanar'ri in the war.

Individual githzerai generally don't get involved. Most of their brethren frown on taking sides, fearing that it's a slippery slope to destruction — first one githzerai takes part, then five, then a hundred, then the whole race. Though there's little fear of ostracism, there's a palpable distrust of any sod who'd risk his whole culture for the sake of tinkering in someone else's war. Besides, who knows what secrets a weak-willed githzerai might reveal if he's caught by one of the baatezu, or if a tanar'ri takes an idle dislike to him? Why invite more raiders to Limbo? It's best, they say, to stay out of it.

HALF-ELVES

Half-elves don't have any particular society on the Outer Planes. Though bands of 'em gather and form towns or mercenary companies, the race has no central theme, no guiding principle — save the constant reminder that they don't fit into either elven or human society. As an outcast, a half-elf's likely to follow one of two paths: either throw in with the baatezu or the tanar'ri, or fight unceasingly against both. In other words, they either ally with the foes of those that rejected them, or they seek glory by trying to end the Blood War single-handedly. With most half-elves, there's little room for compromise.

It might sound barmy, but it works. A number of half-elves have even achieved a measure of success. See, their drive to prove themselves is far fiercer than most folks suspect. That fire often pushes half-elves to extremes that other mortals wouldn't contemplate.

For the most part, half-elves remain loners. The irony of it all is that they've no real reason to feel like outcasts. Perhaps they don't have a society to call their own, but that's no crime. And few planar bats an eye when dealing with a half-elf; they see far stranger every day.

HUMANS

Unlike almost any other race on the Outer Planes, humans can't be nailed down by any central philosophy. They're scattered across the planes, making their homes where they will, and profiting how they like from the Blood War. Some humans build mercantile empires that supply the fiends' demands for arms and equipment, while others withdraw into mountain retreats and wait for the war to end. Still more declare personal crusades and go to fight the fiends — all fiends, with nary a care for law or chaos. There's no end to the diversity of humans.

Some races sneer that humans can't be trusted. That ain't entirely true, but there's *enough* truth to it that most nonhumans are peery around mankind. Fact is, some find it easier to trust a fiend — at least they have a clue as to how the creature's likely to respond. Not so with humans.

Two of 'em with similar backgrounds often have different opinions on everything under the skies.

TIEFLINGS

More lonely and bitter than half-elves, less trusted than humans, the tieflings walk the fringes of planar society. Because one of his ancestors — perhaps even one of his parents — was a fiend, a tiefling is never fully accepted by other planars. It's said that blood breeds true, and old prejudices die hard.

Of all the planar races, tieflings are probably the most split. Some relish their tainted blood; they seek out their immortal ancestors and beg for boons or chances to prove themselves in the creatures' eyes. Other tieflings carry a burden of shame; they spurn the evil of their forefathers and struggle to redeem themselves in their *own* eyes.

When it comes to the Blood War, tieflings flit in more directions than humans do. Some throw themselves in with whole-hearted abandon, seeking acceptance in the killing fields. Others distance themselves as much as possible.

Many experiment with their heritage, trying to find where they fit; those with baatezu blood favor Baator, and those with tanar'ri blood lean toward the Abyss.

An erinyes traps a githzerai in shifter's manacles.



◆ THE FACTIONS ◆

Some folks believe that every mortal on the planes belongs to one of the 15 factions. That's barmy nonsense — plenty stay away from those philosophical social clubs, but the faction boys do their level best to make it seem otherwise. And the fact is that they don't hurt for membership. Chant says that the factions control Sigil, and that those who hold Sigil control the Outer Planes. True or not, the factions do wield a lot of power in the City of Doors.

A berk's faction beliefs are probably the second-most influential beliefs he can have (or the first, for those who can throw off the pull of their race). That is, after all, the whole point of a faction — to adopt a particular view of the multiverse and work toward making it true.

When it comes to the Blood War, the factions definitely have things to say. Not every factioneer's got to follow the guidelines given below, but most sods do; it frees them of the onerous burden of forming their own opinions. Generally, only the more free-spirited take the time to form their own thoughts.

THE ATHAR

The Defiers, oddly, have no quarrel with the Blood War. The "powers" don't stick their noses in the conflict too much, and that suits the faction just fine. Thus, the Athar try to attend to more pressing matters — like discrediting other philosophies, tearing down the so-called deities, and defending against enemies of the faction.

On the other hand, the Athar *do* admire the very existence of the baatezu and tanar'ri. It's no dark that the fiends are born from the spirits of deaders, and this muddies the theory that all petitioners go to the realms of their powers. The Athar see it as more proof that the "gods" are ordinary pikers who've just managed to build up some muscle and magic.

The existence of the fiendish near-powers causes a bit more of a schism among the Defiers. Some see the Lords of the Nine as berks setting themselves up as gods over the baatezu, and strive to tear down their works. Other Defiers think the real problem is the Abyssal lords, and they push to defeat these up-and-coming "powers." Defiers who follow either track always look for help from the other factions to reach their goals.

For the most part, though, the Athar stays out of the Blood War. Any Defiers who meddle in the clash do so under their own initiative, without the faction's blessing or guidance.

THE BELIEVERS OF THE SOURCE

The Godsmen think along the same lines as the Athar — they see nothing wrong with the Blood War, as long as it stays on the Lower Planes. The faction's logged countless hours



I'LL GIVE YA
MY OPINION
AS SOON AS MY FACTOR
TELLS ME WHAT I+ IS.

— A TYPICAL FACTIONEER

push itself beyond its limits, if it wants to earn a promotion to the next racial rank.

In short, the Godsmen see the Blood War as a fiendish debate. It's a cosmic test to determine which method of ascent is more correct, which race's beliefs deserve to win out. When the dust all clears, whoever's won — baatezu or tanar'ri — has justified their philosophy.

A handful of faction members holds that if the Blood War ever ends, the multiverse will end as well. After all, if one entire race of fiends proves itself worthy of ascension, must not the rest of the planes follow suit shortly thereafter? Some Godsmen believe this is a noble goal, and they do their best to promote one side or the other. Others find it repulsive; they want everyone (even the fiends) to find his own path to goodness, with no outside aid.

Again, like the Athar, the Godsmen have no set policy on the war. They simply watch it with hawklike precision, hoping to catch a glimpse of the underlying true divinity. They haven't found anything yet, but that doesn't mean it's not there to find.

THE BLEAK CABAL

No surprises here — the Bleakers see the Blood War as a complete waste of time and life. Ultimately, they don't think there's any great answer worth fighting for, and the fiends are fools for believing otherwise. 'Course, no Bleaker's going to tell a fiend that to its face; faction members are unhappy, not barmy.

To the Bleak Cabal, the Blood War is a big cosmic joke played by no one at all, and the fiends are the butt of that joke. They've fallen for it hook, line, and sinker, and there's not even a punchline. The fiends're peeling themselves into killing each other off, and for what? Nothing. Nothing at all. The joke has no meaning.

Fighting's not going to solve anyone's problems. A body's got to look inside to find the dark of the multiverse, the truth of himself. Only a leatherhead takes out his ignorance on others. 'Course, most of the sods of the planes do it anyway, so the Bleakers aren't surprised that the fiends do it, too.

If push came to shove, the Bleakers would probably favor the tanar'ri. After all, the faction bars lawful berks from its ranks — structure-loving fools can't accept the fact

that the multiverse makes no sense. Naturally, the baatezu can't either; in fact, they're actively trying to *impose* order on reality. That just won't do. Still, a body should remember that the Bleakers think all fiends are leatherheads, and don't care much for either side.

THE DOOMGUARD

The Sinkers love the Blood War. Everything falls apart – everything's meant to – and the war makes it crumble that much faster. The faction does anything it can to foster the continuation of the fighting. The conflict is entropy incarnate, and it spills over into so many planes and so many facets of existence that it's the perfect tool of decay. If the Doomguard could intensify the war, they would. But because they can't (at least, not in any way they can see), they settle for supplying both sides and reveling in the destruction that results.

Chant is that the Doomguard are working with the tanar'ri, using the vast power of the fiends to spread chaos throughout the Cage. After all, they put a cambion, Ely Cromlich (PI/δ tanar'ri [marquis cambion]/F18/CE), in charge of the weapons of the Armory (the faction's headquarters in Sigil). But then why have so many cutters spied baatezu entering the building?

Two splinter groups in the faction aren't quite as rabid about promoting the Blood War. The first bunch has its sights set on a more gradual, natural decay of the cosmos – its members don't regard wanton destruction as

true entropy. A second, smaller group thinks that the planes're falling apart too *fast*, ahead of schedule, in large part thanks to the fiends' war. Both of these groups work silently (though not together) to oppose Sinkers who encourage the fighting.

Factol Terrance of the Athar discusses the evolution of fiends.



THE DUSTMEN

All of existence is a progression toward the True Death. The Dustmen believe that death is good, death is desirable, but they despise anything they consider to be unnatural death – at least, as much as the clinical sods can despise anything. And the Blood War inflicts more unnatural death than the faction could ever keep track of.

Basically, the war's just a sign that the multiverse is full of those who're already dead and don't know it. The fiends hurry to waste their existences, never contemplating what it is they're rushing toward. Sure, they're made of the dead already – being formed from petitioners and all – but they don't understand that they've got to *know* what they're trying to accomplish. Then again, maybe they do and just aren't letting anyone know. But the Dead feel that the fiends are striving much too hard.

The Dustmen aren't much involved in the war, and they certainly don't fight in it. They might pass through the battlefields to give their respects to the fallen (or collect the bodies), but they're not particularly rabid about either baatezu or tanar'ri. They're one of the few factions that really pushes for an end to the fighting, though their efforts hardly seem like much of a push.

THE FATED

It should come as no surprise that the Fated see the Blood War as their beliefs in action. The baatezu and tanar'ri are two of the most powerful races in the multiverse, and they have every right to struggle for control – the conflict will determine which is fit to rule. The side

that ultimately wins is the side that deserved to win, plain and simple. And any fiend that schemes its way to promotion along the way must have been strong and canny enough to earn it.

Of all the factions, the Takers tend to profit the most from the war. They seize any opportunity available to grab whatever they can for themselves. Many factioneers are in the business of supply, and they've got plenty of arms and equipment to peddle, seeing as they've taken goods from so many. They sell to the tanar'ri, they sell to the baatezu – whoever meets their prices can buy their wares.

Some Fated factotums have qualms about dealing with the fiends. Chant says the creatures (especially the baatezu) always try to stick a catch in whatever bargains they make. Who knows what sort of strictures they've put on the deals with the Fated? Still, many good-aligned faction members look the other way. What better way to profit from the war than to take from the fiends? If the creatures suffer in the process, so much the better.

THE FRATERNITY OF ORDER

In the dirty fighting of the Blood War, the Fraternity of Order definitely comes down on the side of the baatezu. The faction hates the chaos and entropy of the tanar'ri, and the baatezu, at least, have a strong, underlying structure to their credit. In any battle where chance wrestles with order, the Guvners are naturally going to choose order. That doesn't mean the faction throws jink or troops behind the lawful fiends – the baatezu are cruel and unpredictable, and a body'd have to be barmy to think he could trust them entirely. (Besides, it'd make the other factions peery about trusting the Guvners.)

Obviously, some members of the Fraternity have a closer kinship with the baatezu – a



few of the fiends even serve as judges in the Guvners' courts — and they do what they can on the sly to give aid. They're in the minority, though; it's faction policy to stay aloof. Guvners are meant to study and interpret the laws, not make them.

So how do factioneers sympathetic to the baatezu's cause lend a hand? Their support is intangible: they try to keep the streets of Sigil free of tanar'i, they make court rulings that serve the baatezu in the long run, and they offer the power of their not-inconsiderable beliefs.

What's more, these Guvners research the laws of Gehenna and the Gray Waste in hopes of helping the baatezu gain an edge there. They've also got their top wizards working on ways to eliminate chaos from an enemy's mind.

THE FREE LEAGUE

As the name suggests, the Free League tries to steer clear of the Blood War. Any Indeps who get involved do so as individuals, and they don't speak for the faction as a whole. 'Course, there really is no "faction as a whole," just a loose affiliation of cutters whose only common ground is their belief that folks should be allowed to think for themselves. The group's not organized, and they don't place any kind of restrictions on who can join.

That means that the warlike Indeps tend to be mercenaries, working for whatever side suits them at the time. Other Free Leaguers curse the war as a senseless waste of life. They've got good reason, too. Plenty of Indep villages litter the Outlands, and when a fiend patrol marches through, the monsters tend to slaughter everything in sight. Many Indeps lose families and friends this way.

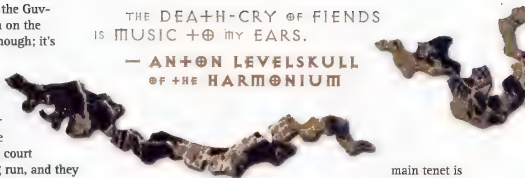
If there were an overriding faction attitude about the Blood War, it'd have to be one of scorn. See, the whole battle concerns two races struggling for power. Power over what? Other folks, in the end. The fiends try to lift themselves up by stepping on the backs of everyone else, and Free Leaguers hate it. No matter who wins the war, everyone loses. Most Indeps want to see an end to the fighting, preferably in a way that'll get rid of the fiends, too.

THE HARMONIUM

The lawful Harmonium, naturally enough, are in business to promote peace and harmony. They believe that their duty is to pacify the multiverse — by whatever means necessary — and the Blood War throws a wrench into the plans. Thus, the Hardheads want to stop the war. 'Course, there's not much chance of that in a thousand lifetimes, so the faction doesn't wade into battle.

Instead, they're content to let the fiends fight it out among themselves. In any clash where evil turns on itself, good is likely to come out the victor. And the Harmonium's

THE DEATH-CRY OF FIENDS
IS MUSIC TO MY EARS.
— ANTHON LEVELSKULL
OF THE HARMONIUM



main tenet is
goodness as defined by the faction).

So, as long as the baatezu and tanar'i keep smashing into each other, the Hardheads are sure that their own values will eventually win out.

Meanwhile, the faction tries to keep the war from spilling over into surrounding lands. They want it confined to the Lower Planes, where innocents are less likely to be hurt (for who on the Lower Planes is innocent?). Chant is that less ethical Hardheads let the slaughter sprawl as a way to weed out the Indeps of the Outlands. But the faction line says that such atrocities will not be tolerated.

In a pinch, the Hardheads'd probably support the baatezu, only because the faction recognizes the need to limit dangerous freedoms with strict laws. Too much freedom, and a society's got anarchy, which leads only to chaos and destruction — as evidenced by the ravages of the tanar'i.

THE MERCYKILLERS

The Red Death aren't subtle about which way the wind blows — they support the baatezu in the Blood War, even going so far as to lend troops and supplies to the fiends. The Mercykillers feel that the lawful fiends are out to avenge crimes committed by the tanar'i, and powers know the Red Death loves punishment more than anything else. 'Course, when it's all said and done, the baatezu will have to be brought to justice for their own atrocities, but for now, they've clearly got right on their side.

Like the Harmonium, the faction's main concern is that the Blood War inflicts needless suffering on anyone who happens to get in the way. No bystander's entirely innocent, but punishment should fit the crime — and the tortures of the war far exceed any reasonable punishment. Mercykiller factotums take their duties seriously, and they pursue any fiends that bring the war to folks who choose not to get involved.

Chant is that the more evil-bent members of the Red Death have worked out a deal with the baatezu. No one's tumbled to the dark of it, but lately a number of berks thrown into Sigil's Prison disappear forever. It's known that the Mercykillers run a hidden prison somewhere on the planes, but word now has it that they sell prisoners as slave labor. If that's true, then the faction's breaking the very laws it's sworn to uphold.

THE REVOLUTIONARY LEAGUE

The Anarchists want to tear down power and structure and rigidity, claiming that it leads to the corruption — or worse, the destruction — of freedom. This belief leads them (many of them, anyway; it's impossible to get two Anarchists to agree on anything) to lend a certain amount of aid to the Abyssal

end of the Blood War. After all, the tanar'ri are trying to tear down the oppressive order of the baatezu hierarchy, and the baatezu are trying to quash the individual expression of the tanar'ri. Granted, the chaotic fiends want to express their individuality in a way that most others consider evil, but still. . .

The Revolutionary League doesn't really want to see the war end. Whoever came out on top would be in a position to let their newfound power and control corrupt them still further. Even the tanar'ri would no doubt give in to the siren song of strength, and they'd lose any purity they once had in their chaos.

Truth to tell, the League would like little more than to see the Blood War ravage the multiverse for a good long while. That'd tear down power structures all over the land, and let the Anarchists put up their own — which, of course, is what they all want to do in the first place.



THE SIGN OF ONE

More than any other faction (except, perhaps, the Free League), the Signers have no consensus on the Blood War. Each member has his own theories on how the multiverse works, and none of them meshes exactly with the ideas of another. Fact is, each Signer imagines himself to be the center of the multiverse, dreaming the whole thing, so it's a given that opinions differ radically.

They do agree on a single point: The Blood War is one brilliant dream. It must have taken an incredible amount of effort and creativity to invent and perpetuate something that rages so wildly across the planes. Unless the war threatens to trouble them personally, Signers are reluctant to interfere with such a work of art. Those interested in proving the power of their minds might try to influence the fighting — to add their own brushstrokes to the canvas — but most factioneers don't bother.

Chant is that the Signers have a Baatorian high-up in their debt; the rumors claim anyone from an army general to one of the Dark Eight themselves. If it's true, the faction likely won't jeopardize that relationship by throwing in with the tanar'ri, but again, it depends on each individual Signer.

A splinter group of the faction — known as the Will of the One — is pushing the rest of the Signers to imagine the dead portal-god Aoskar back to life. Other Signers want to see a more active power returned. There's no telling what effect a "resurrected" deity would have on the Blood War, but some Signers fear trumpeting their agenda too loudly. The baatezu or tanar'ri might try to force the faction to bring back a fiendish god of their choosing.

THE SOCIETY OF SENSATION

Despite the fact that they're constantly looking for new sensations and fresh experiences, the Sensates don't support the Blood War. They see it as the frivolous destruction of life, land, and wares that could instead be used to enhance the lives of folks across the multiverse.

On the other hand, the fighting does hold intriguing experiences for an adventuresome Sensate who wants to go to the extremes. Unfortunately, the lures quickly pale when the sod either dies or realizes that the war offers only pain and suffering. Some Sensates enjoy that (though most prefer tamer pastures), and those who try to sample the Blood War



WHERE . . .
WHERE DO I
SIGN UP FOR . . .
FOR THE BLEAK CABAL?

— A SENSATE WHO
+ASTED +00 MUCH
OF THE WAR

are admired by their fellows. It takes a special kind of resolve to accept what the war has to give. Most folks can't muster it.

When it comes to taking sides, Sensates are free to do as their curiosity dictates. Factioneers throw in with either army, but most end up supporting the tanar'ri — the dull sameness and inflexibility of the baatezu drives them away.

But really, enlistment is just for the addle-coves who can't imagine an experience for themselves.

THE TRANSCENDENT ORDER

The Ciphers, with their penchant for combining the many into the one, the disparate into the whole, and the clashing into the harmonious, don't really care one way or another about the Blood War. The conflict's not about the marriage of thought and action; it's about the pigheadedness of the fiends and their unwillingness to recognize that they've got to change things about themselves.

Yes, the Ciphers disdain both the tanar'ri and the baatezu. The lawful fiends think too much, planning everything in minuscule, crushing detail before they act; the chaotic fiends think too little, rushing blindly into trouble without ever letting reflection guide their response.

The only way a Cipher'd stick his nose in the war would be as a balancing agent, a mediator, between the careful plots of the baatezu and the irrational bluster of the tanar'ri. More likely, he'd stand back and watch, or just go someplace else and do something worthwhile with his time. The fiends' feud holds little attraction for the Transcendent Order; the factioneers would rather partake of meaning in their meandering.

THE XAOSITECTS

Ha! To ask a Chaosman what he thinks of the Blood War is to try to change a leaf in flight. A body won't get a straight answer, and anyone who persists would have to be even more barmy than the Xaositects seem to be.

The faction embodies freedom in the truest sense of the word, not even allowing themselves the luxury of internal strictures. Perhaps they serve a higher purpose than even they know, but, on the surface, Xaositects have no interest in adhering to anything. That includes the Blood War. Just because the berks are chaotic doesn't mean they side with the tanar'ri — they're too unpredictable to have loyalty to anyone. And if a Xaositect got it in his head to take up arms and fight for one side or the other, no doubt he'd change his mind a little while later.

No, as always, the Chaosmen go their own way, and the rest of the multiverse can sod off.

THE CITY OF DOORS

Sigil's the city at the center of everything, right? So why ain't it one of the most fiercely contested battlegrounds in the Blood War? If the fiends aren't here fighting for it, it can't be all that important. If Sigil were really that valuable, you'd think the fiends would do more than roam around and drink with devas!

— Niroj de Hin, Clueless

Sigil goes by many names: the Cage, the City of Doors, and the City at the Center of Everything, among others.

But that last one deserves special note — Sigil picked up that nickname for a reason. It's here that planewalkers from all over the multiverse gather to exchange secrets and depart to points unknown. As such, Sigil's one of the most important places in the cosmos — as well as the biggest cage folks're ever likely to see.

This chapter details the significance of Sigil to the Blood War. The chant's meant for both planar and prime-material characters. Naturally, most planars are

familiar enough with Sigil to

dive right in and start reading. But players of prime characters shouldn't look through this chapter until their heroes have spent some time on the planes, or until they can charm (or bribe) the information out of a friendly Cager.

◆ CAP+URING SIGIL ◆

Plenty of folks remark that Sigil's location and its many portals should attract the worst of the Blood War. After all, whoever controlled the portals'd control, well, everything. They say the streets should be filled with fiends of every description fighting over the spoils, that no sod with any brains would ever want to come here — that the whole city should be nothing but a battlefield.

Theoretically, they're right. But there's one factor they're forgetting: the Lady of Pain. With her abilities to flay a berk with her gaze or spin him into an eternal maze, the Lady ensures that any fiendish brawling on the streets isn't reflective of the larger war outside. She's got remarkably short tolerance for fiends abusing their power in her city, though she's not always dead-on in her enforcement; the Slags in the Hive (ravaged in a six-week spillover of the Blood War) bear mute testimony to that.

Undeniably, the City of Doors is a prize that the fiends would kill to have. Fact is, hundreds of thousands (or more) have met their ends trying to take the Cage. Only those who arrive without aggressive intent have a hope of surviving — or those who learn to mask their hostility with a smile. It's a sure bet that half of the fiends in the city are looking for a way to drag it over to their side. But the Lady performs her balancing act too well, and it's unlikely that any fiend can tip the scales on its own.

Rumor has it that the baatezu have constructed a replica of the Cage on an infernal layer of their home plane, that they're doing their level best to build it complete in every detail. Once they have a working model, they can study it until they learn how to conquer the *real* city. And to make their model complete, all they need now are the folks who live in Sigil. Back-alley whispers say that bubbers and barmies have been slowly disappearing from the

WE COULD CONQUER SIGIL
ANYTIME WE WANTED.
WE JUST DON'T WANT +@,
+HAT'S ALL.

— @S'SRUM +HE LOUD,
A SPINAG@N



city, day by day. And the occasional party of primes and planars turns up missing now and again, as well.

'Course, that's no sure proof of evil doings. Sods disappear from the Cage all the time. Some tumble through portals, while others wind up in the dead-book. Explanations abound as to why familiar faces aren't there anymore, but for some people, those claims don't quite ring true.

In any case, the latest game in the seedy dives of the Lower Ward is speculation: what would the fiends — baatezu or tanar'ri — do with Sigil if they nabbed it? Would they turn it into a great headquarters for their race, using its portals to strike at their enemies from a place of safety? Would they turn it into a prison camp, closing all the doors and relegating their foes to the grimy streets? Or might they try to destroy it, to teach the Lady of Pain the price of butting into their affairs?

Some believe that the Lady herself used to be an Abyssal high-up — 'course, once a fiend, always a fiend, others say — and that the tanar'ri want to take the city to punish her for turning stag on her own race. It's even banded about that gaining control of the portals is just a secondary goal.

Now, if, the tanar'ri could just produce the poor sod who's supposed to punish her. . .

◆ DIPLOMACY AND DECEPTION ◆

The City of Doors is more than just the ring that the fiends are grabbing for. Sigil's the most truly neutral place in the multiverse, and it's become a waystation for the people of the planes.

Rivalries don't die in Sigil, but feuding visitors can set aside their differences for a moment while they pursue their own goals. Fiends hit the Cage to recruit allies; they tire of getting peeled by the treacherous yugoloths and are always on the lookout for other partners. Thus, a body can see a cornugon tipping a glass with a deva, and the two almost seem to enjoy the strange company.

What's more, the fiends have to tone down their tempers while in Sigil, or the Lady'll put them in the dead-book for sure. They just can't wantonly kill a berk who annoys them — at least, not in public. (A sod who hassles a fiend in a little-used alley probably won't walk out again.) Thanks to the enforced peace, a body can even spy a tanar'ri and baatezu sharing a table at a tavern in the Hive! It still ain't a common sight, but Sigil is one of the few places in the multiverse where the lawful and chaotic fiends don't automatically go for each other's throats.

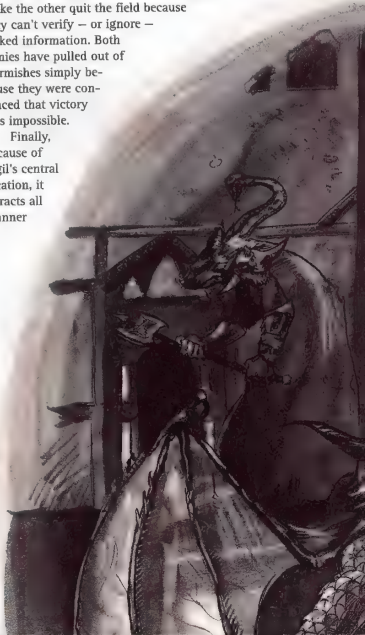
Eventually, though, that peace is what drives the fiends back out of the Cage. Most of them can't keep their violent natures in check for long, and they run home to purge themselves of the hatred that's been building without release. Thus, the fiendish population of the Cage is always in flux; only the strongest can stay in town for more than a few weeks at a time.

So, Sigil won't be a major staging point for the Blood War anytime soon. But it's still an ideal launching pad for spies, assassins, and strike forces. Moving in stealth through the darkened streets, squads of soldiers creep to portals that'll whisk them to their enemies' strongholds. The laws of the city prohibit such maneuvers, but what Harmonium patrol's tough enough to enforce them? The best bet for the watch is to point out any suspicious tanar'ri to the baatezu — and vice versa. Let the fiends do each other in. It might result in a little destruction, but the Hardheads and Mercy-killers want to make sure the fiends know that Sigil ain't their playground.

Any mortal dealing with a fiend in the Cage ought to know this: the creatures see the city as a way to pass on misinformation to thwart their enemies. As the focal point of the Outer Planes, any rumors that spin out of Sigil take on the status of truth (or, at least, credibility), and they'll go far if dropped in the right ears.

Fact is, whole battles have been waged with nothing but words and lies. Baatezu and tanar'ri play games of dueling rumors, each striving to make the other quit the field because they can't verify — or ignore — leaked information. Both armies have pulled out of skirmishes simply because they were convinced that victory was impossible.

Finally, because of Sigil's central location, it attracts all manner of



bashers. Primes, planars, proxies, warriors, wizards, rogues, mercenaries, loyalists — all come to the Cage sooner or later, and all can be manipulated into serving some fiendish purpose in the Blood War. Many want nothing to do with the conflict, while others sign on as soon as they step through a portal.

◆ COMMON CHANT ◆

The Blood War is so sodding huge that it generates enough rumors, gossip, and news to drown a hundred snoops a day. 'Course, about half of what a body hears is barmy talk, and about half is outdated. It's the part left over that's the good stuff, and the best way to keep abreast of a situation is to keep an ear to the ground.

The rumors below were collected in Sigil, where chant of the Blood War is thickest. Only a leatherhead would bet his life on some of the gossip, but there's a

good chance that part of it's true. Still, true or false, the following rumors have the Cage abuzz, and it's always a good idea to keep up on the latest chant.

DIVINA+IONS

Self-proclaimed seers and prophets flood the streets of Sigil. They make all sorts of forecasts about the near future of the Blood War, each claim more extravagant (and less accurate) than the last. Currently, a very amusing prediction's making the rounds. It seems a blind prime who lives in the Hive is spouting nonsense about how the war'll shift, and shift radically, right quick — something about how both the tanar'ri and baatezu will fall, with unknown forces moving in to seize the whole ball of wax.

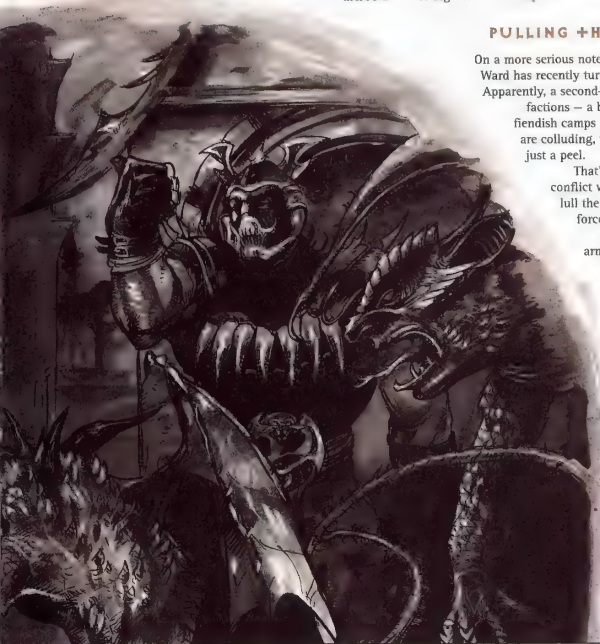
Even more laughable, the berk claims that dead and undead gods'll stride forth from the silver void to reclaim their titles. Sure, the chant's a tale for addle-coves, but it's a fine tonic for the troubled times. With all the gloom and doom of late, the barmy prime has provided the informants of Sigil with a rare smile.

PULLING +HE WOOL

On a more serious note, speculation in The Lady's Ward has recently turned downright frightening. Apparently, a second-in-command of one of the factions — a blood with contacts in both fiendish camps — claims that the two sides are colluding, that the whole Blood War's just a peel.

That's right. The millennia-long conflict was nothing but a set-up to lull the celestials into thinking the forces of evil were incapable of working together. With the armies of light now busy with their own squabbles, the baatezu and tanar'ri plan to join forces and strike at the strongholds of goodness.

In related news, chant says the celestials are scrambling to build up their defenses. Evidently, they've let themselves grow weak and fat while waiting for the fiends to destroy each other, and now the fiends are presenting a front stronger than the do-gooders ever dared imagine.



SAFE HOUSES

In a city as full of intrigue as Sigil, a body's got to know where he can hide. Maybe he's turned stag on a faction high-up, or he's on the run from a fiend and needs a safe case to bed down for the night. Unfortunately, safe houses ain't common in the Cage, thanks in part to the Harmonium — they've come down so hard on the Anarchists and Indeps lately that any berk with a secret is guarding it even more closely than before.

But a cutter in the know can find places of safety, houses reputed to be so neutral that they open the door to anyone with the right password. Even fiends and celestials



I SAY ARM
+THE FIENDS +@ +THE HILT.
GIVE +HEM ENOUGH ROPE
+@ HANG +HEMSELVES.

— SPIRAL HAL'OUGH+,
AN AASIMAR MERCHANT

are welcome, as long as they abide by the rules of the kips. Fact is, one safe house — said to be a sentient building, the repository of an exiled god's spirit — is rumored to regularly host delegations from both Baator and the Abyss.

Chant is that the fiends who go there are looking to negotiate a Blood War cease-fire, for reasons unknown. Anyone barmy enough to want in on the matter should ask around in the Lower Ward. It's said a slim tiefling woman with bristlelike hair (and a very sharp knife) can lead a body to the kip.

MINING +THE PRIME

Snooty planars tend to deny it, but the Prime Material Plane is a choice jewel for anyone strong enough to take it. The Prime has resources, it's not really aligned, and the billions of mortals would make handy armies, servants, or cannon fodder for the Blood War. Gossip in the Great Bazaar has the fiends planning sneak attacks on magic-rich prime-material worlds, scheming to attract hordes of worshippers, and toppling the gods that mean so much to mortal sods.

Why are the fiends out to gain control of the Prime (or just a few of its crystal spheres)? Well, the baatezu and tanar'ri replenish their numbers with petitioners, and petitioners are the spirits of deaders from — that's right — the Prime. Each race hopes to grab the power's share of prime-material worlds, then convert them to lawful or chaotic evil so the spirits'll fly to the "right" Outer Plane.

Granted, it's a dangerous action and one that's likely to provoke the powers, but word is that the fiends don't give a toss — they're getting desperate and need more recruits.

HIGH-UP CORRUPTION

How could the celestials be sure that the fiends would never attack the Upper Planes? By playing them off each other until they did themselves in. And how would the celestials go about such a plan?

Well, disturbing chant in the Market Ward — the home of deals and peels — says that the upper-planar cutters fan the flames of the war by selling weapons, tips, and magic to both baatezu and tanar'ri. The bashers spreading this gossip have nothing to back up their claims but logic. See, the celestials can't afford to fight both races of fiends — they might not even be able to take on one. It only makes sense that they'd want to weaken both armies as much as they could.

Now and then, this or that deva is marked as getting a little *too* involved in the arms business, or an aasimar here or there is linked to a secret chain of yugoloth spies. Again, nothing's been proven so far. But those who believe the rumors don't know whether to be sickened by the duplicity, or grateful that the celestials are working against the fiends however they can.

THE SLIDING PLANES

The Blood War is finally taking its toll on the middle planes. Chant is that Mechanus and Limbo are getting ready to slip over into the Lower Planes — the fiends have finally converted (or destroyed) enough modrons and slaadi to tip the balance. The Great Ring's going to tilt off-kilter, and powers only know what it'll mean for the multiverse when it's all said and done.

Thanks to this rumor, hordes of do-gooders have descended on Mechanus and Limbo, doing their blessed duty to keep the planes mired in neutrality, if not drag them over to goodness outright. And evil berks have answered, flocking to the middle planes to make sure the descent goes off as "scheduled." What's most amusing is that neither plane was probably likely to slip in the first place.

RECRUITERS

Fiends in Sigil constantly rattle their bone-boxes, trying to talk everyone and his uncle into joining their armies. Each side dangles attractive lures, promising adventure and fame, gold and glory. It's no dark that the baatezu always attach secret riders to their contracts, and the tanar'ri rarely honor their word. But that doesn't stop young Cagers and primes — sure they can take care of themselves — from signing up.

One of the most successful recruiters is a nycaloth called Stammering Azarin (Pl/d yugoloth [nycaloth]/HD 11+22/NE). Azarin works for either side of the war, depending on who manages to get his bid that day. Each morning, one tanar'ri and one baatezu wait outside his black-brick flat in the Hive, each eager to convince Azarin to work for them that day. The two fiends are always on their best be-



*Do you seek great adventure?
Great treasure?
Immortal fame?
Respect of your peers?*

If you answered "yes!" to any of these questions,
you might have what it takes to enlist
in...

THE GLORIOUS BAATEZV ARMY

Benefits include:

Competitive pay!
Prompt payment — you'll always get
what you deserve!

Guaranteed promotions!
Excellent severance pay!
Travel and meals (all you can eat)!

Why wait? Enlist now! See the Lower Planes!

havior, too — any brawls, and Azarin goes recruiting for other parties.

Any berk who inks his name on one of Azarin's contracts had best know what he's getting into. Most are stuck in the Blood War forever; once their physical bodies fall, their petitioner spirits must continue to honor the deal.

When signing on with the baatezu, a body must specify his terms of service, outlining *exactly* what he expects from the fiends and *exactly* what is expected of him. The lawful fiends won't break their written word, and Azarin sends copies of all signed contracts to Gehenna for safe storage in the vaults of the yugoloths.

'Course, signing on with the tanar'i's a good deal easier — just mark an "X" and it's done. But don't expect any promises in return. The tanar'i pay better than the baatezu, but enlisting with the chaotic fiends is a huge gamble.

HOT PROPERT+

This is a truth: Some cutters make a living by stealing weapons and equipment from Blood War battlefields, giving the fiends the laugh, and selling the items in marketplaces across the Outlands. Plenty of vendors end up paying the music, but many succeed and prosper. Word is that any blood interested in buying stolen fiendish goods should wear red striped boots to the bazaar in the gate-town of Tradegate. A runner'll make contact and set up an auction.

Just about anything created on the Lower Planes is for sale. Sometimes the scavengers get lucky and find a piece of *real* quality. Lately, they claim to have been finding more and more celestial equipment, though the bodies of the former owners are nowhere around.

THE RISING OF THE STYX

A wave of amnesia's passed through the volcanic gate-town of Torch. It's almost like a disease, but the people of Torch claim that the waters of the River Styx are rising up and flooding the marshes just outside of town. Most likely, the truth is that the town's food stores or wells've been spiked by some practical joker.

But if the chant's true, what would that mean for the Outlands? The Styx has never backed up before — what's the reason, and where will the waters reach next? Because the river's linked so closely to the tides of evil on the Lower Planes, it's possible that the flooding is a sign that the Blood War is about to enter a new phase.

THE BERK ON THE STREET

Cagers have a vested interest in the outcome of the Blood War, and they follow news of it closely through the grapevine. With the fiends constantly eyeing the city and its inhabitants, folks there'd better keep up to date on what's happening.

An enterprising group of cutters has even gone so far as to

put together a press sheet with daily reports on how the war fares. It's called *Life in Wartime*. Established only a few years ago, the *Wartime*'s staff has increased to over 50 people — the

sheet sells like crazy. Staff reporters use the portals of Sigil to visit the known battlefields of the war, in hopes that they'll pick up on a trend Cagers should be aware of.

Naturally, the baatezu and tanar'i aren't so keen on a mortal rag publishing their secret battle plans, and it's said that they've leaned on the staff quite heavily. In any case, the facts continue to see print, but the *Wartime* is now more useful for lurid accounts and sensationalism — which might help to explain its recent successes in the Cage.

That's just one example of how Cagers dabble in the Blood War. Many others earn their living from it, whether as participants, suppliers, or opponents. Arms dealers abound in the city; their palatial mansions in The Lady's Ward attest to how well they profit from the misery of the fighting. Recruiters also roam the streets, especially those of the Lower Ward and the Hive, searching for sods to fill out the fiendish armies.

And then there are the adventurers, bashers who span the spectrum of opinion and importance. They're the true wild cards in the Blood War, because no one's sure exactly what they'll do — or, indeed, what they're capable of doing. Powers know that hero-types have accomplished plenty of impossible things in the past. Chant is that no mortal fools could ever hope to affect the war on any important level, but adventurers always seem to tell the laws of logic and chance to pike it and get away with it.

Few Cagers agree on what stance to take on the Blood War — the cosmopolitan nature of the city sees to that. But the citizens union on two points. First, the war's not likely to end or change any time soon, despite any sod's best efforts. It's simply lasted too long and gone too far to wrap up tidily in the next few years.

Second, they don't want the city to fall into the hands of the fiends. Even the powers'd shudder at that. Though they trust the Lady to repel any and all attacks — she has, after all, stood off the gods themselves for this long — Cagers are willing to defend Sigil against fiendish menaces that arise from the Blood War.

BLOODS + KNOW

No matter how much a body learns about the Blood War, it's never enough. The folks described below are a few bloods

WHADDAYA MEAN,

"STOLEN"?

THIS ABYSSAL SKIN-FLAYER
BELONGED TO MY
DEAR OLD AUNTIE!

— A MERCHANT IN
TRADEGATE

that many Cagers turn to when they need chant or favors. Someone with contacts or access to an information network should be able to get a hold of them without too much trouble. They don't provide their services for free, but then, who does?

TERL GOSSIP

Terl Gossip (Pl/♀ human/B8/Free League/N) devotes her days to uncovering the rumors of Sigil. As a Cager born and bred, she's all too aware that the city hides its secrets well from the average basher. It takes real digging, a snoop who's dedicated and tenacious, and Terl's that snoop. She's always wanted to be in on the chant, and now she's granted herself the status of know-it-all.

But knowledge ain't cheap. Terl needs to make a living, and she sells her information to anyone who can afford it. Something that's fairly well known goes for just a few coppers, while the secrets of the factions can run as high as 10,000 in gold.

The only reason Terl is still alive is that she's a master of disguise. Right now, she's wanted by the Harmonium, the Guvners, and the Mercykillers for selling some of their forbidden lore to the editor of an underground tome. So she's not easy to find. But a cutter who needs her services should poke around in The Lady's Ward for a while, pleasantly greeting every Harmonium watchman he sees. Terl will take notice and arrange a clandestine meeting.

Naturally, she finds out all she can about the basher who wants to meet her, and Terl usually winds up knowing more about her client than the client does. If she uncovers something that makes her uncomfortable — like maybe the "client" is really a bounty hunter out for her head — well, Terl has plenty of other customers. When the berk shows up at the meeting place, he'll find nothing but a note to let him know Terl's on to him (no doubt along with mentions of dirty little secrets that he'd rather keep quiet).

It's said that Terl never forgets any knowledge that enters her brain-box. Be that as it may, the woman's still mortal, capable of making mistakes. It's just that no one's ever caught her doing it. Then again, Terl doesn't guarantee the accuracy of her information. She just passes on what she hears.

MIRROR WILL

Mirror Will (Pr/♂ elf/M6/Sign of One/LG) is a prime who's lived in Sigil for at least five decades. His apothecary/alchemy shop, hidden deep in the Clerk's Ward, caters to folks who need rare minerals or hard-to-find spell components.

That's useful enough, but Will's more than just a shopkeeper. He hasn't aged at all for the last fifty years. Granted, that's easily chalked up to potions (or elven blood), but

Will has one other feature that can't be explained away.

The cutter didn't pick up his name by accident. With a bit of concentration, he can split himself into two separate but identical bodies, each with its own mind and will. They share memories up to the moment of the split, and each body acts in accordance with the goals Will had in mind when he separated.

Once the deed's done, the two bodies step into each other, and Will's whole again. He claims to retain whatever knowledge both bodies gained while they were apart. And he won't say *why* he can do what he does (though some think it's a result of his faction belief in the ultimate power of the mind).



Thus, one of Mirror Will's bodies is always out traveling and procuring, while the other minds the store. It's a handy arrangement, allowing him to make the most of his time. And if one of his bodies dies, a *resurrection* spell cast on the other will bring it back to life.

'Course, Will doesn't like facing death, so he's always looking for escorts for his traveling self. Most of his trips take him to the Lower Planes — often through Blood War battlefields — and he prefers to cultivate the acquaintance of good, tough bashers. He pays well, and offers discounts and free goods for those who do him right. Chant is that traveling with Will's a good way to see the Blood War without actually getting stuck in the worst of it.

AR+AGEL BOO+LEGGER

Artigel Bootlegger (Pl/♂ tiefling/F4/Fated/CN) can get a body just about anything he needs. A short, powerfully-muscled tiefling with a quick laugh, Artigel works out of Tradegate, but he's got a booth in the Bazaar in the Market Ward. Then again, the blood travels so much that it's hard to say if he calls anywhere home.

Artigel's not ashamed to admit that he's a smuggler. Fact is, he boasts of his ability to get through any checkpoint, any customs, any inspection, with all his goods still intact and ready for immediate delivery to the client.

Those who go through Artigel should come prepared with deep pockets. If he merely arranges for goods to make their way into a client's hands, he charges a minimum of 500 gp per item. If he's hired to smuggle a person to a place of safety, the price goes up to 1,000 or more a head, depending on the level of danger.

Artigel charges a steep price, but he's worth every copper. He's never steered anyone wrong, nor delivered a sod into the wrong hands, and that's rare — especially for a tiefling.

AN+RALIUS AND BB'BRAY

Antralius (Pl/♂ baatezu [osyluth]/HD 5/LE) and Bb'bray (Pl/♂ tanar'ri [babau]/HD 8+14/CE) are as unlikely a pair as they come. Both are military enforcers for the Blood War, and though they serve opposite sides of the fence, they don't seem to hate each other.

Antralius is an osyluth that fled from the netherworld of Baator, claiming that its nagging conscience would no longer let it push other baatezu to certain death at the hands of tanar'ri troops. Careful and fastidious, Antralius speaks slowly, with a buzzing voice, and it always appears to be sensitive to the needs of others.

Bb'bray is a babau, a skeletal police officer of the Abyss. It, too, claims to have escaped from the bondage of



the Blood War, making its way to Sigil to find allies who seek to stop the violence.

The story goes that the two met in the Hive and managed to put aside their racial hatred long enough to speak with each other. To their surprise, they found kindred spirits, and swore to work together to bring the Blood War to an end. Since that day, Antralius and Bb'bray are never seen apart, as if both were afraid the other'd fall without constant guidance. Fact is, they've saved each other's lives on several occasions, sometimes at the expense of their former fellows. Antralius once slew a cornugon looking to start a fight, and Bb'bray killed a pair of vrocks out for the osyluth's blood.

The pair's often seen preaching in the Lower Ward against the evils of the Blood War, their voices rising above the hubbub in an effort to make themselves heard and understood. They've managed to turn a few of their brethren away from the war, and they try to stymie fiendish recruiting efforts throughout Sigil.

Peery folks say both fiends are double agents, working against each other in secret while proclaiming their friendship in public. Others think that one is playing the other for a sap, but can't agree which is the trickster and which the victim. In any case, everyone in Sigil agrees that they've never seen a stranger pairing come out of the Blood War.

THE CHANT OF THE WAR ♦ A PLAYER'S GUIDE ♦

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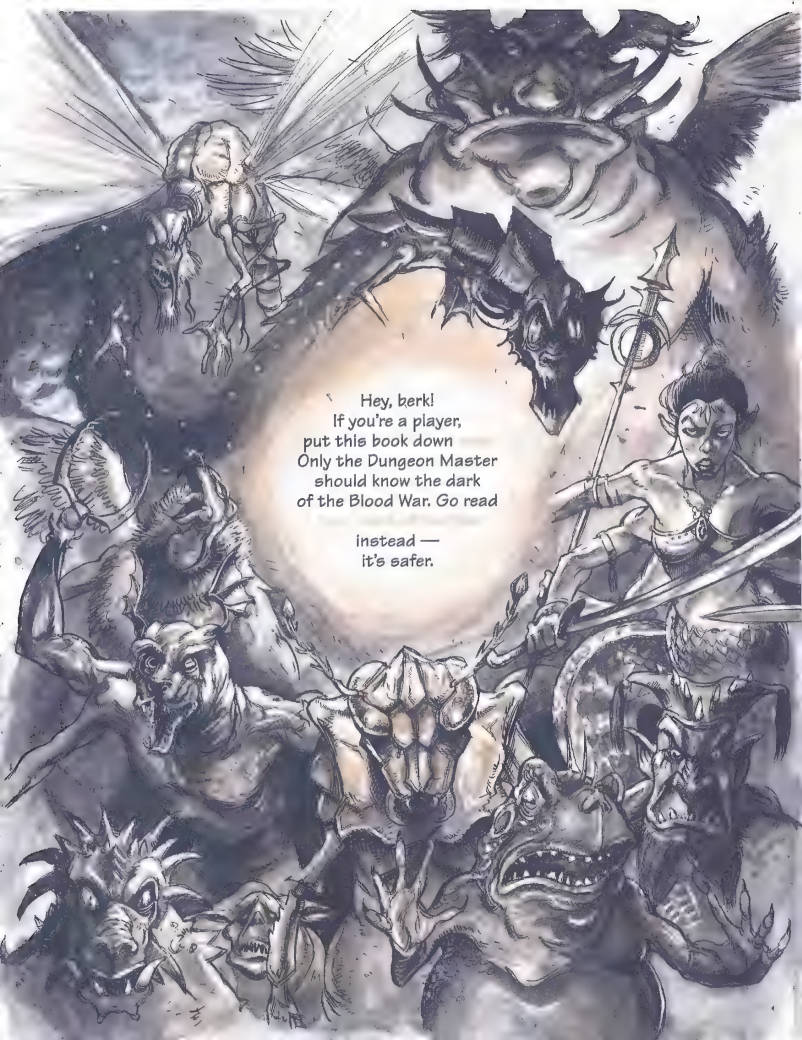
DELUXE ADVENTURE
& ACCESSORY

hellBOUND:

THE BLOOD WAR

THE
DARK
OF THE
WAR

♦ A DM's Guide ♦



Hey, berk!
If you're a player,
put this book down
Only the Dungeon Master
should know the dark
of the Blood War. Go read

instead —
it's safer.

THE DARK OF THE WAR

◆ A DM's GUIDE ◆

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When, in the course of events both divine and material, a chance develops on the face of reality, all beings must arise and take notice. The Blood War is such a chance, its pustules rising across the Lower Planes.

INTRODUCTION

This tome is a call to arms for those who would oppose evil, for those who would see evil crushed and routed beneath the heels of righteousness and goodness.

There is no other way.

— from the introduction to *The Blood War: An Essay*, by Willion the Pious

Some folks believe that you can contribute one way or another to the Blood War. It ain't true, least not as far as most contributions go. The war's just too big, and most times, a small push one way or another ain't going to do a thing. 'Course, if a body can manage to make a small push in the right place and at the right time, she can change the entire face of the multiverse. But no one's yet found that time or that place.

That's why it's important to study the history of the Blood War — to find the right time to apply that slightest amount of pressure. After all, what's been is too often a harbinger of what will be. Right now, the fighting's contained (mostly) on the Lower Planes. But only a leatherhead could fail to realize what'd happen if the fiends turned against the forces of the Upper.

In the meantime, while we're studying how to stop them, the fiends'll go on slaughtering each other like they've been doing since time immemorial. That's not going to change in the near future.

— from *The History of the Blood War*, Vol. II,
by Suzameade Haralin the Greater



THE + BLOOD WAR +

The Blood War's been raging for an awfully long time. Some say it's weathered the birth of the planes and the advent of the first mortal, and that it'll survive the foreseen death of the last. It spans time for all of recorded history — which, in the planes, goes back a *long* way — and there's no time in anyone's memory that it hasn't raged across the Lower Planes. That goes for the powers, too, for as far back as their memories extend. And it's said *they've* been around for as long as creation.

So it's a bit of a task to try to fit the story of the war into just a few books. That don't mean bloods haven't *tried*. Mortals and immortals alike have labored to catalogue the war's excesses, triumphs, and losses, their observations and insights filling libraries that could span nations on any prime-material world. Some bloods, such as Suzameade Haralin the Greater, have delivered telling insights, while others, like Willion the Pious, are more known for their flights of fancy and ignorant remarks regarding the ebb and flow of the war. But the vast majority of tomes don't come close to painting the *true* portrait of the Blood War, and precious few have pierced the dark of the whole sordid mess.

Fact is, it should come as no surprise that very few sods know *anything* of value about the war. Millions of pages have been scrawled about it, and most of that material's contradictory and confusing, sometimes even within the same work.



This book, though, hits the mark. It's a torchlight, a guide through the darkest depths of the war, the secrets suppressed for years, the players in the great farce and their part in keeping it going. It's what the other tomes couldn't begin to approach (though some of those authors may have guessed at the magnitude of the revelations they missed).

This book is also a reference for anyone who's wondered about the Blood War and how to use it for personal gain. These pages uncover:

- ◆ a history of the war, presenting some of its blackest moments in plain sight. Learn of the treacheries and double-crosses of the baatezu and the tanar'ri, the veiled agendas of the yugoloths, and the meddling of the powers and celestials.
- ◆ breakdowns of the baatezu and tanar'ri forces, along with more detailed descriptions of those who command their loyalties. Ever wonder about Baator's Dark Eight? The lords of the Abyss? The generals of the fiendish armies? Find them here.
- ◆ a close look at the roles of the yugoloths, the celestials, the scavenging slaadi, the yugoloth-hating gehreleths, and the modron Army of the Blood War.
- ◆ the strategies of the baatezu and tanar'ri generals, from lightning feints and ponderous marches to sailing the Styx and *gating* in allies. A body who sees how the leaders spread resources around – and how they command and view their troops – can see why the war has dragged on as long as it has.
- ◆ the insidious magic only whispered about by those not directly involved in the war, and the ways by which fiends themselves learn the wizardly arts (or don priestly robes). The mighty glaives of the Lower Planes, the amulets that empower slaves to topple kings, and the spells that spew acid or shake the ground – all are laid bare, their legends made concrete.
- ◆ sites of battles great and small, which can be read as mere history or brought to bloody life for today's heroes. Learn the legends of these places of power, and weigh the wisdom of fighting to the death for a scrap of land.
- ◆ the meddling of the powers of the planes – their loyalties and leanings, their faithful proxies, and their ability to muck up the course of the war.
- ◆ bit parts for those out to make a difference – or make a living. The war chews up couriers, mercenaries, spies, and the like so fast that there's always a need for more.

◆ USING THIS BOOK ◆

Naturally, Dungeon Masters (DMs) who plan to involve their player characters (PCs) in the Blood War will find this book invaluable. Whether the DM just wants to let the heroes get their toes wet, or whether he wants to throw them into the deep end head-first, *The Dark of the War* holds all the answers.

'Course, those answers should stay under lock and key

– this chant is for the DM's eyes only. And don't let the

PCs mug one fiend and learn all the secrets of

the war! Rumors, lies, and half-

truths can and should reach

their ears quite

easily. But the real truth

of the war – any part of the truth – should take its

own sweet time. After all, most folks

never tumble to the dark of

the conflict.

They just play their little roles, never even aware of their connection (if any) to the whole. The PCs should be required to prove their mettle in dangerous quests before getting a glimpse of the Blood War's secrets, and even then they should be made to feel that their hard-won prize is just one small piece of a mammoth puzzle.

Not every DM'll want to use all the chant in this book. Some might relish putting their own spins on a particular aspect of the war, and others might just want to guard against nosy players who read this book on the sly. That's fine; feel free to mix and match, taking the desired bits and discarding the rest. (Keep in mind that much of the information in *The Dark of the War* comes into play in the three adventures found in *War Games*. A DM who alters the information'll have to tinker with the adventures, too.)

The Appendix (pages 77–80) features tables that show the attack capabilities, normal and special vulnerabilities, and reference sources for the three main races involved in the war – baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloth. This chant has been collected from many previous sources (as listed on page 80), and revised and updated to weed out errors. The tables here are the definitive statement on the matter.

In the end, *The Dark of the War* is an aid to bring the battle to terrifying life for player characters. Even small details can drive the horror of the war home. This book spills over with such tidbits, and they twist and link to sketch the whole picture of the war.

Beware, though – the picture ain't pretty. It's more the kind of portrait a body stashes in the cellar when his kindly aunt drops by for tea. But now it's time to hang the gruesome tableau squarely for all to see.

USING THE ♦ OTHER BOOKS ♦

Here's a quick rundown on the other four volumes in the *Hellbound* boxed set:

- ♦ *The Chant of the War*. This guide gives players a crash course in what their characters are likely to know about the war. The DM can hand it to the players and let them read to their heart's content. 'Course, the DM should read the guide too, just to be up on what the player characters know (and don't know).

War Games. This book contains three separate adventures involving the war: "The Field of Nettles," "Strange Bedfellows," and "Squaring the Circle." The DM can run one or all of the adventures for the PCs, in any order.

Visions of War. This full-color, digest-sized booklet contains 14 different illustrations for the adventures. At certain points in each adventure, the text instructs the DM to show the corresponding illustration to the players. Don't let the players flip through the book ahead of time; they shouldn't see what's waiting for them in the adventures.

Visions of War also contains three player maps for the adventures. As the heroes obtain each map during game play, the DM should let the players see the map in the book.

The Bargain. This full-color comic book of fiendish love and betrayal, written by Jeff Grubb and illustrated by Robb Ruppel and DiTerlizzi, is meant for both DMs and players. *The Dark of the War* hints at some of the events in the story, but reading the comic won't ruin any surprises.



They say that history's written by the winner, that those in charge get to present the past in whatever light they see fit. But what happens when no winner steps forth, or worse — when a *handful* of forces all claim the right to record (or dream up) history?

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

That's the situation with the Blood War. Depending on a body's leanings, he can cast pretty much any race he likes as victor or victim, and decide which event was a bold battle for freedom and which a cowardly act of terrorism. And he can probably find a source to back him up, too. So how does a sod ever learn the dark? Simple — read everything, listen to everyone, and pry between the lines.

† THE FOUND

The following is taken from the pages of the forbidden yugoloth text, *The Book of Derelict Magicks*, a source whose veracity is often questioned.

In the beginning, primal forces raged back and forth across the playing field of the unformed mass of Being. Their struggles twisted and deformed the whole scope of existence as Each sought to be the guiding force for all that was. Good wrestled with Evil, and Law with Chaos, while Neutrality, the field for which They fought, lay between. But They were too evenly balanced, and None could gain an advantage over Its foe. And then Law combined with Good and Evil, as did Chaos, and the war entered a new stage. They raised Their power in these new combinations, but still no resolution came forth, and the war rolled on.

Eventually, They paused. They saw that Their struggles had achieved nothing, and knew that something new must come. And so They created Their minions, creatures that could serve Them and work as agents in the primordial struggle.

One force created the baernaloths, creatures of sagacious wisdom and unbridled cunning. The baernaloths consulted among themselves for a time beyond imagining, seeking a way that their patron might triumph over the rest of creation.

In their wisdom, the baernaloths created the race of yugoloths, setting up the entire caste system and structure of the creatures so that their patron force would gain ever more adherents, followers who could act with power to carry out the edicts of the baernaloths.

And thus arose the only race that seeks perfection. Other races claim that their goal is to achieve this ideal state, but these unfortunates allow mistakes and are tainted by their weak philosophies. Only the yugoloths truly court perfection, and only the yugoloths have a chance of realizing this goal.

(At this point, the text digresses on the merits of the yugoloth race, returning to its original focus hundreds of pages later.)

But the perfection of the yugoloths was threatened by the meddling hands of Law and Chaos. The early yugoloths had to contend with warring natures and questions of ethics in their pursuit of perfection. One of the first yugoloths to achieve the rank of ultroloth devised a solution: It would expunge all Law and Chaos from its race, forcing these base corruptions into the lesser creatures of the Gray Waste. After much experimentation, the ultroloth finally found an answer in the creation of a magical stone called the Heart of Darkness, and it summoned its fellows.

When the ultroloth explained its plan, it was hailed as a hero for its clear thinking and ability. And thus it began to remove all trace of Law and Chaos from its cohorts, passing the purged energies into the multitudinous larvae it had collected. Some yugoloths refused the Heart of Darkness; they fled deeper into the glooms of the Waste (and beyond) when their brothers turned on them. (Their eventual fate is not known.)

When the ultroloth had finished, its brethren stood tall and pure.

The larvae grew and mutated, the forces of Law and Chaos twisting them into impure mockeries of the yugoloths, and the ultroloth drove them forth from the Waste. Those who'd received strands of Law made their way to Baator, while those who'd received threads of chaos journeyed to the Abyss. Though they varied in form and purpose, all these creatures still carried the essence of the yugoloths; thus will they be controlled when the yugoloths are once again ready to extend their dominion over the planes.



The ultroloth took the accolades of its lessers, and taught a number of the arcanaloths the secrets of power. When it had finished, it vanished into the misty furnaces of Gehenna. And thus did the General of Gehenna receive its title.

It is said that when the end is near, the General will once more come forth from Gehenna, bringing secrets that will drive the multiverse to its knees. Until that time, the yugoloths are free to plot and plan for the future, each seeking a place in the history of the illustrious race.



TRUE EVIL CAN TAKE
MANY FORMS.

— APOMPS,
CREATOR OF THE
GEHRELETHS

‘Course, because *The Book of Derelict Magicks* was penned by one of the members of the “illustrious race,” the ideas espoused above are suspect, especially given the possibility that the author’s gone barmy. But it’s well known that the yugoloths are the only fiendish race that aren’t spawned, at least in part, from the hordes of petitioners. No one knows where they come from, which is one of the reasons that the Founding Myth’s given any credence at all.

◆ THE TIME LINE ◆

In a battle that’s spanned so many millennia, it’s only natural that a long and not-so-illustrious history grows up around it. Memories of atrocities and shining moments mark the time, and planars still thrill (and frighten) their children with tales of the noblest and basest points in the fighting. What follows is a roughly chronological record of events leading up to the Blood War, and the greatest moments in the history of the war itself.

No actual dates pin down any of the events described; most of ‘em happened so long ago that twenty Guvnors couldn’t count back that many years. And the time line’s not a complete record of every minor squabble, feint, and skirmish. Instead, it hits the highest and lowest points, as well as the events that later turned out to be significant, however much they might have been ignored when they took place.

A word of caution: The time line’s based, in part, on the annals of the yugoloths, as well as the known or supposed histories of the baatezu, the tanar’ri, and various other planar races. Fact is, the first few entries come entirely from yugoloth records, including *The Book of Derelict Magicks*, the *Skin Manifesto*, and the horrifying *Maledictus Liberis*. (Baatezu texts, more than any other, dispute the chant found in those tomes and put their own spin on events.)

Thus, the time line presented here might harbor a few inconsistencies. But it’s as close as a body can hope to get.

THE BEGINNING. The planes are formed; some time later, the baernaloths stagger forth from the mists of creation, already beginning to hatch plans. Their free-willed children, the yugoloths, are spawned some millennia afterward; they begin to implement the baernaloths’ plans.

THE FLOW OF THE GREAT PATH. The River Styx, originally just a minor trickle through the Lower Planes, becomes a stream, a creek, a river, and then a raging torrent, as the evil of the baernaloths swells. Whether the baernaloths increased its flow or whether it just reacted to their presence is a moot point. The river is deemed a Great Path, and in the years to come, it figures prominently in the strategies of the Blood War. It serves as transport, as a hazard, and as a symbol of the bitterness of the war.

THE BIRTH OF THE GEHRELETH. One of the baernaloths, Apomps, tries to duplicate the creation of the yugoloths. Using the bodies of dead yugoloths, Apomps breathes life into a brand-new race of beings that are absolutely loyal to their creator. In the process of forming these beasts, Apomps is horribly twisted and deformed. Nonetheless, it’s mightily proud of its achievements, and it shows the creatures — called gehreleths — to its peers.

The other baernaloths are outraged (perhaps due to the chaotic nature of the gehreleths), and cast Apomps from their number. With its gehreleths in tow, Apomps retreats to Carceri, vowing bitter war against the baernaloths and their creations, the yugoloths.

THE CANNING OF LAW AND CHAOS. The General of Gehenna, the first ultroloth, creates the Heart of Darkness — a magical stone that drives the “impurities” of law and chaos from the hearts of those that touch it, and utterly destroys those who champion good. The General gathers the host of yugoloths to it, and uses the Heart to make them pure.

The General channels these expunged forces into the natural larvae of the Gray Waste; the influx of law and chaos twists the creatures into new beings that eventually become the first baatezu and tanar’ri. (Some histories mention that the General spoke with these larvae and imprinted dire magic in their heads before sending them on their respective ways.)

THE GROUNDING OF THE BAATEZU AND TANAR’RI. The baatezu histories pick up at this point, claiming that the baatezu and the tanar’ri sprang full-born from the hearts of their home planes, ready to do battle over their clashing philosophies of evil. Few tanar’ri histories exist; those that do are too muddled and exaggerated to be of much use.

Yugoloth texts, on the other hand, claim that the yugoloths herded the mutated larvae to Baator and the Abyss. The larvae then changed further, becoming creatures more suited to their new environment, until all on a plane became part of the same race. Thus did the Baatorian larvae become the baatezu, and the Abyssal larvae become the tanar’ri.

Many millions of each race are formed, though most of the new creatures have no way to spawn more of their kind (only a few varieties can breed).

The same yugoloths tomes claim that the 'loths retain control over the two new races by means of a mysterious being called the Maeldur Et Kavurik. It is through the grace of the Maeldur that the baatezu and tanar'ri are able to teleport across the planes at will. And should the yugoloths ever decide to reassert dominion over the fledgling fiends, they will look to the Maeldur for the way.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE BAERNALOATHS. Around the same time that the baatezu and tanar'ri established footholds in their respective planes, the baernaloths suddenly withdrew from their imperial positions over the rest of the yugoloth race. They slipped away, in ones and threes, into the Gray Waste, leaving behind little evidence of their existence. The yugoloth race was bereft of its leaders, and the ultraloths stepped in to take the place of the baernaloths.

Adventurous yugoloths and seekers of knowledge still hunt the surviving baernaloths, but of those few that return, even fewer return with any success.

THE BLOOD WAR BEGINS. A party of baatezu explorers sets out across the planes to discover what's what and who's where. They encounter yugoloths, who show themselves to be wholly mercenary and without any sort of ethical guidance; to the baatezu, the yugoloths are weak-willed and foolish. And so the fiends press on. They push through Carceri and into the Abyss, where they meet their first tanar'ri. The innate philosophical opposition of the two races manifests as violent hatred, and the baatezu slaughter as many tanar'ri as they can before returning to Baator to report their findings.

Meanwhile, a group of tanar'ri decides, on the spur of the moment, to explore the planes. As they cross the Gray Waste, they find yugoloths, and torture and slay a good number just for fun. Moving farther on, the tanar'ri make their way onto Baator, where they run into a small patrol of baatezu. The tanar'ri rend as many as they can. Some insist they press on until all baatezu fall; others slip off from the group and return to the Abyss.

Both sides now possess knowledge of the other, and their first meetings have exploded with rabid hatred — the Blood War has officially begun. At first, only small groups and raiding parties skirmish back and forth across the planes. But soon the parties grow into battalions, and the battalions swell into armies.

Scholars will later attribute the seeds of the fighting to a number of factors: sheer hatred; philosophical differences; the need to crush a powerful opponent before being crushed in turn; the realization that the predominant belief on a plot of land *moves* that land to the plane most like it; and the primordial desire to hold ground as a point of selfish pride.

The greatest impetus, though, is the struggle between law and chaos to change the face of evil. That's as far as it needs to go.

THE YUGOLOTHS AS MERCENARIES. After centuries of isolationism, arcanaloths travel to the tanar'ri and baatezu commanders, offering the services of their race in the Blood War. They bring contracts written on the skins of the dead, all of which are far more binding on the clients than on the yugoloths. This marks the first time the yugoloths become directly involved in fighting the war.

It also marks the first time that the yugoloths betray one side or the other — fact is, it happens during the very first battle in which the yugoloths take part. What's more, it soon becomes clear that their aid has an odd way of skewing key clashes one way or another. But the baatezu and tanar'ri see this only as malevolent incompetence, unwilling to consider that the yugoloths might have a *direction* in mind for the Blood War.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE LORDS. Alternate histories posit that the yugoloths who drove the mutated larvae become the Lords of the Nine and the Princes of the Abyss (later called Abyssal lords), drawing their power from the awe of the larvae beneath them. Others claim that the Lords and the Princes are born from the very nature of the planes, appearing because they *have to*. Still more suggest that the reclusive baernaloths create these positions to watch over the development of the new races more closely. In any case, the emergence of these powers brings a new element to the Blood War.

Later, some of the Lords and the Princes are deposed by baatezu or tanar'ri who gain enough power to challenge the rulers and win. After that, the Lords and Princes each set up hierarchies of forms and powers to make sure that ambitious fiends spend their time and efforts struggling for dominance with one another. That way, the fiends have a much slimmer chance of rising enough in rank to actually take on the Lords and Princes.

It is from this point that vague records accessible to mortals begin. 'Course, as the fools have no idea what has already transpired, speculations abound. Most blame the Lords and the Princes for bringing the baatezu and tanar'ri to war.

THE PATTERN OF THE WAR. In the initial years of the war, the balance of power swings wildly from the baatezu to the tanar'ri and back again. Armies appear on the other's doorstep, ravaging and pillaging before they're driven back across the planes by a hastily-assembled force of opponents. Whole sections of Carceri and Gehenna fall under the control of one side or the other every few years; vast portions of land slide chaos-ward or law-ward, only to return to their original planes when the other fiends gain ascendancy.

As the war progresses, the balance of power shifts less dramatically. New developments and key battles allow the armies of each side to punch through the defenses of the other. Soon, even these victories come less frequently, as the two forces become ever more intimately acquainted. Still, with each clash, the two races continue to dwindle in number, for few fiends can reproduce.

THE PLANES. The baatezu and tanar'ri each send large parties out to explore the surrounding planes. They travel in all directions, seeking exit from Baator and the Abyss. Some find portals; others find Paths (Yggdrasil, the Styx, and the like). And those who make it out discover that there's far more to the scheme of things than their war.

Thus, the baatezu and tanar'ri find even more reason to destroy each other — a whole multiverse waits to be conquered by the victors. 'Course, neither side can attack the rest of the planes until their fiendish opponents are first smitten. This increases the intensity of the war, as commanders of both armies realize that the spoils of the multiverse are at stake.

THE INTERVENTION OF THE CELESTIALS. When fiends travel, they don't do it halfway; nor do they adhere to local customs. In their exploration of the planes, both baatezu and tanar'ri ruffle a few feathers. As a result, their upper-planar counterparts, the celestials, marshal forces to ride against the callous fiends who dare invade their sanctity.

With a flurry of pinions and blazing swords, an army of millions of archons and asimons takes the fight to the Lower Planes. Their eyes burn with righteousness, their spirits afire with the desire to stop evil — and the need for vengeance. The celestials take the diabolical armies unaware, and they lay about with great fury, caring not what sort of fiends they fell.

The battle rages for a year, the tanar'ri and baatezu fighting the celestials and each other. Then the two fiendish races decide to forget their eternal struggle long enough to rout the upper-planar forces. Both armies turn on the celestials, striking them from all sides. Within a week, the celestials fall back, their pure robes stained and dirty, their hands covered in blood. Only 3,000 are said to survive.

It is from this battle that the celestials learn to be more cautious in their dealings with the fiends. If they choose to renew their attack on the Lower Planes, they must concentrate on destroying either the baatezu or the tanar'ri — not both.

Naturally, the celestials are split about which side to decimate, and which to leave be. The lawful archons favor the continued existence of the baatezu, while



the chaotic asimon endorse the success of the tanar'ri. This leads to a schism among the normally peaceful celestials; thus does enmity breed even among beings of great good. They cannot deny the primal struggle of law and chaos.

THE KEEPER OF KNOWLEDGE. Unbeknownst to either side, both tanar'ri and baatezu charge certain members of their races with the accumulation of knowledge. Among the tanar'ri, this position is filled by whoever wants it, and histories are rewritten to fit the motives of whoever's in power at the moment. The baatezu aren't much better. For the most part, pit fiends keep ruthlessly honest records, noting for posterity which campaigns suffer and which succeed. But sometimes, for political reasons, they conveniently lose or alter records to reflect the prevailing moods.

The arcanaloths are said to write the only honest histories, seeing as they check and double-check each other's work. Unfortunately, their records are all but inaccessible, buried as they are beneath the Tower of the Arcanaloths in the furnaces of Gehenna.

THE POWERS. After a time, the Blood Warriors realize that they're not the only forces for change on the planes. They learn of the existence of *powers* – godlike beings that've been around for what seems like forever, though it's only now that they involve themselves in the Blood War.

One or two gods of chaos decide to support their philosophy by fighting on the side of the tanar'ri. The fiends become nearly unstoppable – until several gods of law step in on the side of the baatezu. Soon, powers across the planes choose sides, and their minions prepare to do battle.

But then, a powerful god of chaos (one of the first to interfere) slowly withers away, its essence scattering to the four winds. The rest of the powers feel their own essences start to dwindle, and they take the hint. They withdraw all obvious support from the war, and decide to intervene more subtly, through their proxies. 'Course, a number of gods of war and destruction continue to dirty their hands in the fighting.

ASSORTED TREACHERIES. During the early days of the Blood War, the fiends try plenty of gambits and trickery to get under the skin of their enemies. Some fail miserably, such as the infamous tanar'ri feint dubbed the Mask of the Pit, in which tanar'ri infiltrators try to creep through a baatezu encampment. The infiltrators disguise themselves as baatezu, but their chaotic cores make it impossible to mimic baatezu rules and customs. Their screams ring across the planes for months afterward.

Other ploys work more admirably; the most successful is the baatezu trick known as the Four-Cross. During intense fighting, a pit fiend general – legend says it was Bel – suddenly orders his troops to switch sides, and they slaughter the other baatezu on the field. The tanar'ri, naturally, are peery that the pit fiend would truly betray his own. Bel tries to win their trust by revealing Baatorian battle plans.

The pit fiend even concocts a scheme to further double-cross the baatezu: He shall return to Baator, pretend to rejoin his fellows, and then betray them again on the battlefield. The tanar'ri agree, and Bel does indeed return to his home plane. But unknown to the tanar'ri, he turns stag on his new comrades by giving the baatezu rough details of tanar'ri plans and troop sizes.

When next the forces of Baator engage those of the Abyss, Bel rides with the baatezu, but he switches sides again in the middle of the fighting – exactly as he told the tanar'ri he would. This time, Bel and his troops fight on the side of chaos for a year and a day, thus earning the full trust of the tanar'ri lords.

And then the pit fiend leads the Abyssal high-ups into a long-arranged baatezu ambush, crippling the tanar'ri efforts for a good decade – they're reduced to fighting a defensive battle from the Abyss. Bel is rewarded for his elaborate double-double-cross with command of the armies of Avernus, the first layer of Baator.

The yugoloths also have a hand in much of the treachery of the Blood War. Though they might seem to betray their employers randomly, a closer examination reveals that they do so only when working for the side that's currently *ahead* in the war – ostensibly, so they can keep the fighting balanced. Somehow, the tanar'ri and the baatezu fail to realize this.

THE PETITIONERS. After millennia of bitter fighting, the fiends discover yet another element: a use for petitioners. Spirits of creatures from a place unknown had long since been arriving on the Lower Planes, their powers weak and their knowledge lacking. The most evil of the spirits became larvae; others were granted various shapes by wicked deities. But in all cases, the fiends merely made sport of eating or maiming the new creatures.

Then the baatezu begin to experiment on the petitioners. They discover that the larvae can be twisted into the forms of lesser baatezu, and then made to serve in armies.

Naturally, the chant leaks to the tanar'ri. (The yugoloths are suspected, but there's no proof of their involvement.) The tanar'ri begin their *own* experiments on Abyssal larvae, and discover that the creatures are particularly easy to mold into lesser tanar'ri. 'Course, the petitioners are mightily hard to control, but once cowed by the greater power of the fiends, they're putty in a master's hands.

This discovery – that larvae formed from petitioner spirits can be reshaped into new fiends – is a turning point in the histories of the baatezu and tanar'ri. For the first time, they realize that they can swell their own populations, that they needn't worry so much about casualties of war.

After a time, the fiends get curious enough to wonder where the spirits come from. Thus, fiendish patrols discover the Prime Material Plane. But they can't invade just yet; they have battles to fight and a war to win.

SIGIL. Somewhere around this time, the fiends discover Sigil. The City of Doors seems to be the perfect launching pad for invasions of all other planes. The only problem is that there's a blood far more powerful keeping the fiends out of the city — the Lady of Pain.

Some say that the Lady is actually a renegade tanar'ri high-up who fled to Sigil to protect herself against the vengeance of her fellows. Maybe she grabbed control of the city in the initial stages of the Blood War, or maybe the chant's just a load of fluff and she's something no more or less than a baatezu lord. No matter — she rules Sigil, and that's that. She doesn't mind lesser fiends in her city, and she tolerates the greater ones, but if any step too far out of line — well, the dead-book always has room for one more name.

Still, this doesn't stop the fiends from planning ways to use Sigil to their advantage. They don't care that many of their numbers get sliced to pieces under the Lady's gaze; they feel they're getting close to the secret of the city, and a few dead compatriots won't put a stop to their efforts.

THE FIELD OF NETTLES. One of the major battlefields of the war, the Field of Nettles, first comes into use as two squadrons of fiends fight it out for possession of 90,000 square miles of wasteland, bluffs, and nettles (the Field is 300 miles to a side). Stuck between two tributaries of the River Styx, the Field becomes a standard staging point for the war, and it's a rare year that doesn't see a battalion or two march through in an attempt to seize the land. Bodies pile high, and the Field rapidly becomes a major scavenging center for those who follow the battles of the Blood War.

THE EXPLOITATION OF THE PRIME. Beyond the Astral Plane lies the Prime Material; it's from here that many mortals hail, and from here that their spirits depart to become petitioners. And as the baatezu and tanar'ri have already discovered, petitioner spirits make ripe fodder for their Blood War armies.

And so it is that the fiends start to recruit on the Prime Material, luring and tricking the mortals into embracing evil, so that their spirits will end up on the Lower Planes. At first, the primes regard the fiends as creatures only slightly less than godlike — in some cases, fiends even replace the local deities — thanks to the creatures' natural abilities and their propensity to lie to achieve their ends. But wiser primes study the fiends, and learn many of their secrets in an amazingly short time (short, at least, for the immortal monsters). Soon, primes learn to summon fiends and bind them to mortal will.

'Course, the fiends find a way to twist even this to their advantage. They promise power and life to leatherheads who summon them, which leads many a greedy berk to call a fiend to the Prime and (through agreement or incompetence) let it loose upon the world. Some fiends even go so far as to manipulate mortal societies, building cultures based around the veneration of despicable values. These cultures inevitably collapse under their own evil, but they still wreak much havoc and doom many spirits to the Lower Planes.

It's also from the Prime that champions arise to drive the fiends back to the Outer Planes.

Though the efforts are largely futile, the fiends come to realize that the primes aren't insects after all —

perhaps they're more on the level of vermin.

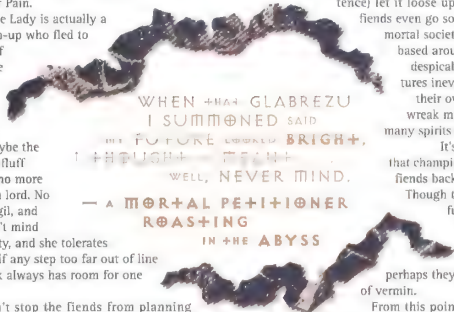
From this point onward, the Blood War is exhaustively detailed, though from many different points of view. Most primes are adamant about recording every detail, though some are more politicized than the baatezu when it comes to leaving out embarrassing or unsavory facts. Still, the sum total of all their accounts gives a body a reasonably close picture of the truth of the matter.

The opening of the Prime Material Plane also creates new classes of fiends, as both tanar'ri and baatezu realize that miscegenation (cross-breeding) is possible with the mortals. From such relations come the cambions, the alu-fiends, and, eventually, the tieflings.

REBELLION OF THE INFERIORS. Morale among the baatezu inferiors plummets to an all-time low. Abishai disappear into the wastes of Baator, and spinagons mysteriously fail to deliver key messages. Even the barbazu, who normally lust for battle, are reluctant to wade into conflict.

Eventually, the pressure erupts, and a town full of lesser baatezu gives over to chaos. The inferiors swarm over higher-ranking fiends, crushing the life from some and holding others hostage. The Dark Eight themselves appear to deal with the situation — and so do a number of balors. It then becomes clear that the rebellion was carefully sown by the tanar'ri. The balors hoped to drive the baatezu into chaos, but failed to appreciate the lesser fiends' ingrained hatred of anything tanar'ric. The hapless balors are torn apart by the very baatezu who'd turned on their masters.

The Dark Eight punish the most prominent of the rebels, leaving no doubt in any fiend's mind what will happen the next time lesser baatezu attempt to revolt.



THE MAW OPENS. A yawning chasm suddenly opens deep in the heart of the Gray Waste, appearing from nowhere and for no readily apparent purpose. Its arrival displaces a yugoloth citadel, which falls silently into the gorge below.

Closer study reveals both the shifting colors of chaos and the rigid lines of law inscribed in a spiral toward the bottom of the chasm. Exploratory yugoloth parties are devoured by the maw, never to be seen again. Chant says that only a perfect combination of law, chaos, and neutrality working together can penetrate the secrets of the maw, now called the Ghoreish Chasm. 'Course, no one's ever gotten far enough to verify the truth of the rumor.

For the first time since their union against the celestials, the baatezu and tanar'ri call a momentary truce. The commanders of both armies agree to meet at the edge of the Ghoreish Chasm on the Gray Waste. Doomsayers and pessimists on both sides trumpet disaster, and the celestials shudder in fear that the two sides might reach an agreement to cease hostilities. Tensions swell, but it seems that the Blood War might at last be nearing an end.

Before long, those who worried breathe a sigh of relief. The conclave erupts into bloodshed as a balor sits in a pit fiend's chair and refuses to move. The ensuing battle pitches all assembled high-ups into the chasm.

Later, the fiends plan further negotiations, but neither side trusts the other to the extent they did before violence broke out at Ghoreish. Nearly all future meetings end in carnage, and any agreements that do emerge are quickly forgotten. Clearly, any chance of peace was destroyed at Ghoreish.

THE DEATH OF ORCUS. Orcus, a major tanar'ri lord, the leader of the undead armies and the eternal foe of Demogorgon, is deposed — or slain — by the drow goddess Kiaransalee. His body is cast into the Astral Plane, his wand locked away in Agathion, the fourth layer of Pandemonium.

The upheaval deals a major blow to the tanar'ri armies, who had come to count on Orcus's undead. Kiaransalee offers similar services, but some tanar'ri high-ups look for ways to restore Orcus to power.

THE SHIPS OF CHAOS. The tanar'ri join forces with the Doomguard, a

mortal faction in Sigil, to create entropic vessels from powdered bones, crushed spirits, and millions of larvae. Meant for use against the baatezu, the *ships of chaos* have powers drawn from the shifting stuff of chaos itself, specially designed to annihilate law.

Fortunately for the baatezu, the *ships of chaos* have yet to be put to use. Tanar'ric infighting over who gets to control each *ship* leaves the crafts grounded, and it looks like it'll be a long time before they ever travel off the Abyss, much less cross the planes to strike against the baatezu.

TODAY. The yugoloths decide that the time has come to rein in their purged offspring. With the aid of the Maeldur Et Kavurik, the 'loths plan to strip the warring fiends of their power to *teleport without error*, then restore it only to those who swear obedience. Wishing to remain in shadow, however, the yugoloths leak carefully planned chant to the Upper Planes. They hope to peel champions of good into unwittingly carrying out the scheme for them.

Meanwhile, the baatezu raid Gehenna and kidnap the Maeldur, though the lawful fiends don't realize the true significance of their prize. Thus does the yugoloth plan teeter at the brink of failure, even as noble heroes ride forth to play their scripted roles.

[For details and repercussions of the yugoloth plot, see "Squaring the Circle" in *War Games*.]



Hey, sod, do you think the fiends sit around tables, glasses held high, and proclaim, "To evil!"? Well, they don't. And don't listen to any graybeard who says they do.

MAJOR PLAYERS

See, like most evil berks, the fiends think they're doing the right thing. It's not a matter of being contrary to what we call goodness; it's just that they're bred with an entirely different view of existence.

They don't actively plot to make life miserable for other folks — at least, not most times. Not unless they think it'll bring a sod closer to enlightenment in the fiendish way, or they think they can squeeze a bit of enjoyment or pleasure out of it. They just want to promote their way of thinking. And if that means a body's got to pay the fiendish music, well, she's going to pay.

Evil's gotten a bad reputation.

But really, it's just another belief system, another way of looking at the planes. Most of the

fiends like to think they're doing

the best thing, either for themselves or for others. But it's rare that a body runs into one who describes itself as out-and-out evil.

Why would it? The very word "evil" has bad connotations, enough to make most folks spit. The term describes doing something that you know is wrong — and that's not what the fiends do. They pursue the only way of life and existence they think to be right. And that ain't evil, to them.

'Course, they don't give a fig what we have to say about it.

— Alain Hellock, former adventurer, diplomat, and, some say, fiend apologist (ostracized for his controversial views)

Everyone knows that the fiends make up the Blood War, that their armies tear endlessly across the Lower Planes, bringing death and destruction to everything in their path. But what troops make up those armies? Who gives the orders? Who takes 'em? And who sits above the fray, moving troops around like pawns on a game board?

Read on, berk.

THE BLOOD WAR
IS BUT A GAME,
THE LOWER PLANES
ARE THE BOARD.

— AILANREAN+ER,
AN ARCANALOTH
ON GEHENNA

◆ THE BAA+EZU ◆

Called "devils" by some, "fiends" by others, and "foes" by the rest, the baatezu armies constitute the lawful half of the Blood War, their numbers darkening the horizons in perfectly ordered regiments. Coldly calculating and shrewdly clever, the baatezu reside on the nine layers of the plane called Baator. They rule their lands with an iron fist, without even a velvet glove to soften the blows.

Fact is, the baatezu make any prime-material despot look like a benevolent uncle, their most lenient policies strict enough to give the harshest mortal ruler hives. The only right way is the baatezu way, and they're more than happy to find room in the dead-book for any fool who disagrees. 'Course, it's more enjoyable for the high-ups to play with that sod's hopes and dreams: the baatezu like their revenge subtle and painful, hoping to drive a berk into the clutches of the Nine Pits when he's dead. And there's no reasoning with a

baatezu that's been slighted, though it might choose to set aside its vengeance if it wants something from its intended victim first. But it'll never completely forgive, and a sod who insults a baatezu ought to watch his back for the rest of his life.

With their love of laws and order, the baatezu follow a strict hierarchy of power. The number three permeates their society. Three times three layers on their home plane, three divisions of power for their race, three different Commands in their armies . . . it's a common theme in their culture. See, they follow the Rule of Threes whenever possible, thinking that it'll dispose the multiverse more kindly to 'em.

DIVISIONS OF POWER

The baatezu mark their power with three ranks: least, lesser, and greater. The least baatezu (the designation that technically includes the spinagons, the nupperibos, and the lemures) haven't got much intelligence between the lot of them; they're likely to fight or flee without much provocation. They make up the bulk of the baatezu armies, as their lives don't mean much in the grand scheme of the Blood War. Fact is, they're only valuable if they can carry out basic battle plans. If they fall down on the job, they're disposable.

'Course, least baatezu might get promoted to the next rank and transform into lesser baatezu. But it ain't a reward for good service. Oh, every now and again a spinagon ascends through exemplary duty, but that's rare — promotion from least to lesser is usually just a matter of chance. Most lesser baatezu (meaning abishai, barbazu, erinyes, hamatula, kocrachons, and osyluths) are chosen at random from the hordes beneath them. But promotions occur quite often; after all, the turnover rate for lesser baatezu is high.

The lesser baatezu pass along the orders from the high-ups in the chain of command. They're mid-dlemen — they enforce the desires of the greater fiends on the masses of least baatezu, their whips and spears driving lemures and nupperibos into battle. Lesser baatezu also fill out the second ranks of the fighting forces; their intelligence and might bolster the mindless masses of the bulk troops. And they actively scheme to ascend to the next rank — that of greater baatezu — seeking power as a mortal seeks bread and water.

Greater baatezu shoulder the responsibility for sending the rest of their numbers into the Blood War. They give the commands that lesser fiends must enforce, and they watch over the development of the race and the promotions from least to lesser to greater. In fact, the lower fiends look to them for guidance and support.

Amnizu, cornugons, gelugons, and pit fiends fill out this rank. 'Course, most greater baatezu ain't happy until they've been promoted to pit fiend — those bloods enjoy the highest power and status in the eyes of their fellows. Still, *all* greater baatezu are powerful and cunning, and their hideous exteriors hide minds and spirits that can crush most any mortal.

Most any other *baatezu*, too. That's why the greater fiends mete out punishments and make the unpopular decisions — the calls to war, the torture and display of rebels, and the endless spirit-crushing routines that mold the lesser ranks into ambitious fiends. Sure, they're hated by those below, but they're also far more powerful, so revolution and resistance come rarely. (When they *do* come, they come with a vengeance.)

SURE, I COULD KILL +HA+
MORTAL WHO STOLE MY SILVER PIECES.
BUT IT'S SWEETER TO THINK OF HIM
LOOKING OVER HIS SHOULDER
FOR THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS,
WONDERING WHEN
I'LL COME FOR HIM.
BECAUSE HE KNOWS +HA+
I WILL COME FOR HIM.
— GOYRISS,
A CORNUGON
IN DIS

THE DARK EIGHT+

Above the greater baatezu are the Dark Eight, a group of eight pit fiends who determine the entire course of the Blood War (at least from the baatezu end). They've ruled their race for millennia, and their number never seems to change. The Eight are called Furgas, Baalzephon, Zimimar, Zapan, Zae-bos, Corin, Dagos, and Pearza.

They meet four times a year in Nessus, the ninth layer of Baator, where they gather in the gigantic fortress known as Malsheem. There, they plot and scheme and rule, passing their edicts down through the ranks of lesser and greater baatezu

alike. At these meetings, the Eight set the strategy for the coming year of the Blood War, and they also consider promotions suggested by their second.

The Dark Eight (Pl/♂, ♀ baatezu [pit fiend]/HD 13/LE) have no obvious powers that make them greater than any other pit fiends. But their intelligence, cunning, guile, and inside information make them more than a match for all but the eldest of their brethren. What's more, chant is that the current members of the Dark Eight have held their positions for so long that no one can recall a time when they *haven't* served on their dread council. (Though all remember Cantrum — the slain founder of the Dark Eight — his time was long, long ago.)

In truth, though, only two members of the Dark Eight remain from the original group. Baalzephon and Furgas are the only fiends who haven't been assassinated or otherwise removed in their long tenure. See, when one of the Dark Eight dies, the others act so quickly and discreetly that the rest of the race never even realizes that there's a void. A pit fiend under the dead one's command is promoted and takes the name of its predecessor, so that no panic or discontent spreads through the ranks. The charade has continued as long as it has due in part to the loyalty (and fear) of the rest of the baatezu. That, and the fact that the Dark Eight *always* kill anyone — even a baatezu — who's suspected of knowing the truth.

Each of the Dark Eight is in charge of a single aspect of the Blood War, and they execute their individual duties however they see fit. While the entire council has the final say on any decisions made by the others, often they pursue their own agendas. But despite the power plays and intrigues, the Eight work well together as a team — the success of their race depends on it. And they'll put aside their rivalries if it means the success or failure of a crucial plan.

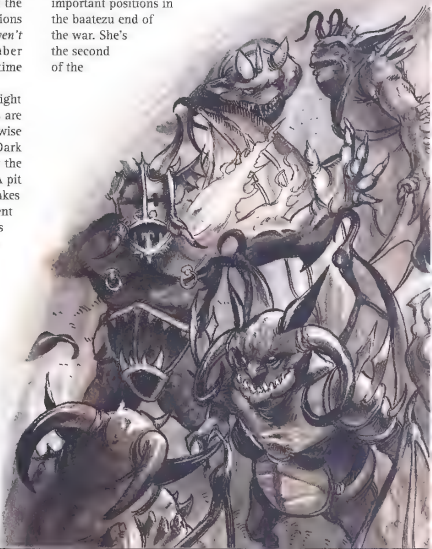
FURCAS — MORTAL RELATIONS

As one of the two remaining members of the original Dark Eight, Furgas wields an incredible amount of power on the council. He knows the secrets and histories of his rivals, having watched them all rise through the ranks of the baatezu. And he plays those rivals against each other like a mortal toys with ants, diverting their attentions while he continues with his own plans.

In keeping with his manipulative streak, Furgas is in charge of Mortal Relations — or, in other words, the corruption and recruitment of willing primes and planars for the baatezu cause. He commands the erinyes and others who can walk the Prime Material Plane. Though Furgas scorns mortals and their petty ambitions, he's smart enough to see them as valuable tools, and, of course, potential recruits when they die. He sends his minions to lure the mightiest sorcerers and strongest warriors into the service of the baatezu. Furgas also seeks out those with potential for such "greatness," and he's always on the lookout for berks who serve the cause of chaos (in order to do away with the dogs *before* they gain too much power).

BAAZEPHON — SUPREMACY

Perhaps the least talkative of any of the Eight, Baalzephon occupies one of the most important positions in the baatezu end of the war. She's the second of the



original Dark Eight, and she didn't rise to her exalted seat by being stupid. Like Furcas, she knows the histories of her rivals on the council, but she doesn't try to win them over through blackmail and extortion. Instead, Baalzephon woos them with fine gifts and promises of support should they pursue avenues of advancement that don't find favor with the others.

She's rarely turned down. Anyone who works against her finds that she's well prepared and well armed, as fits her position of Supply Master for all of Baator. See, it's her job to make sure that the Blood War troops are armed and armored, and that they've got all the food and equipment they need. Without Baalzephon, the armies of Baator would grind to a halt. She knows it, and she makes sure everyone else does, too.

Though it's surprising for a pit fiend, Zimimar is friendly to everyone below her station, no matter how lowly. 'Course, being a fiend, that friendship don't count for beans. She uses it like she uses everything else — to gain an edge. Sadly, her talents are somewhat wasted, as she's in charge of making sure the baatezu armies remain in good spirits (or as good as the spirits ever get). Zimimar's also got to quash rebellion and insurrection among the lower ranks.

Sure, she's all smiles, but it's said that she grins even when she

crushes the last breath out of a foe. The lesser fiends know that when Zimimar's looking to boost morale, more heads'll adorn stakes in Avernus unless spirits pick up, and that right quick.

It could be said that her main job is to cover up the mistakes of the *rest* of the Dark Eight. But most don't say it, because it's likely to get back to her. Zimimar's got a network of informants that reaches all the way down to spinagon level, and she's more than happy to punish anyone speaking against the rightful power of the council. If a traveler on Baator feels like he's being watched, he can bet that it's because of Zimimar's agents and their prying eyes.

ZAPAN — IMMORTAL KILLER

Smooth and unctuous, the current Zapan has held his seat for several centuries. He gained his station through clever dealings and oily insinuation, wheedling his way into power with no talent but his ability to strike a bargain with anyone. Chant is that Furcas wanted to recruit him as a protege, but Zapan set his sights on a different calling — pulling the wool over the eyes of fellow immortals. It's through him that the baatezu deal with the yugoloths, the archons, proxies of various evil powers, and even the tanar'ri.

Zapan deals with all such bloods on equal footing, offering terms that most'd find hard to resist. It's said that he can sweet-talk the feathers from an archon. The fiend gives sympathy where it's needed, hard words where *they're* needed, and a supportive hand in everything else. What's more, his "employees," as he likes to call them, seek to emulate him in all their dealings.

Zaebo works closely with Zimimar as she tries to boost the morale of the race. See, Zaebo overses the game of promotions and demotions among the everyday fiends of Baator (Dagos judges those who fight the Blood War). He's got access to all the records of the baatezu, and his bureaucracy is the most carefully watched on the plane — after all, it just wouldn't do to have an unfit baatezu rise through the ranks.

Zaebo is slow, careful, and meticulous. He's also said to be one of the most hated baatezu on the Lower Planes, because his scrutinizing eye has denied many a fiend its chance at promotion. It's little wonder that the position of Zaebo is often filled and refilled. The current Zaebo has held office for only three centuries, but he already knows not to cross his fellows on the council. So it looks like he might hold the position for a good bit longer.


CORIN — THE CHAOTIC

Of all the Dark Eight, Corin is the most chaotic. He shifts between dark brooding and all-out rages. Those who see his mood swings would swear that he's more balor than pit fiend. What they don't know is that it's all an act, a bluff to keep his foes from getting a true understanding of his nature. And that's just as he likes it, because his command demands it.



Corin's in charge of making sure that all tanar'ri plans end up in the hands of the baatezu generals. When the Abyss makes a move, Baator usually knows about it within a day. The fiend's got spies burrowed into the ranks of the baatezu, the tanar'ri, the yugoloths, and even the celestials. He likes to keep abreast of situations, and there's very little that takes him by surprise — though occasionally he pretends otherwise to keep his foes off balance.

DAGOS — STRATEGY.



Crisp and direct, Dagos commands the generals of the baatezu forces. Nine fiends fall under his rule — Alusiel, Phanior, Galarond, Kobbis, Meathe, Laginus, Bel, Meritos, and Hanariel — and each of them works with the Three Commands of the baatezu (see "The Three Commands," below). Under direction from Dagos, the nine have whipped their armies into fighting forces with a truly astonishing grasp of military order and precision.

Dagos weeds out corruption in the ranks ferociously, chastising and demoting (both in rank and actual power) any Blood Warrior caught in double-deals that jeopardize the cause. Course, the rules don't apply to him — he's above such concerns, as any ruler should be (or so he thinks). He commands with a steel hand and tolerates no mistakes. It's largely due to the discipline he squeezes out of his troops that those below him get promoted more quickly than those underneath the other members of the Dark Eight.

PEARZA — RESEARCH AND IMPLEMENTATION.

Pearza, the newest member of the Eight, still seeks a way to deal with the rest of the council. She walks a thin line between brashness and cunning, looking for the balance that'll get her what she wants. But if she doesn't find it soon, it's likely she'll be "replaced" by another fiend who's more able to do the job.

Pearza and her underlings are instrumental to the Blood War effort. They research new magic and methods to build engines and devices that'll wreak havoc on the hated tanar'ri. What's more, Pearza also commands the kocrachon torturers at the Knoll of Blades, those who've learned the most efficient ways to extract knowledge from a subject. As a result, Pearza's ranks are among the most prestigious on Baator. Many fiends enter her group in order to make a name for themselves and gain quick advancement.

THE LORDS OF THE NINE

With each of the Dark Eight in charge of a particular aspect of the Blood War, a curious body'd think something greater's in charge of *them*. If such a being exists, mortal sages don't know about it. What they do know about are the Lords of the Nine, the rulers of the layers of Baator.

The Lords sit as far above the Dark Eight in might and influence as the Dark Eight sit above a spinagon. They're not full-fledged deities, but their status is still out of reach of most baatezu. See, the Lords are the monarchs of Baator. They leave the running of the Blood War to the Dark Eight (letting the pit fiends direct the battle as they see fit), and instead focus on tending to the plane itself.

The chant says that each Lord presides over an entire layer of Baator. Their dominion stretches across the layer, and they're always trying to extend their reach to yet another part of the plane — into the territory of other Lords. Some say their power is absolute on their chosen layer, much like a deity's will is absolute in its realm. But the gods can resist the desires of the Lords; not even the rulers of Baator dare to cross the powers of the plane. Rather, the two groups co-exist, their ambitions sometimes colliding, sometimes coinciding.

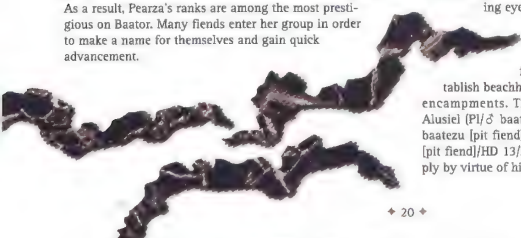
A few graybeards figure that there's another strata of fiend in between the Lords and the Eight, a group of noble-class baatezu who serve the Lords in their endless machinations and schemes. Supposedly, the Lords use these puppets to play off each other and sow discontent among their enemies. Like the princes of a mortal court, the noble fiends dabble in intrigue and politics, but with prizes far greater than any dreamed of by petty human courtiers.

THE THREE COMMANDS

As mentioned previously, the baatezu generals of the Blood War fall under the command of Dagos, the fiend of the Dark Eight in charge of strategy. Baator's army is divided into three Commands, each with three generals presiding. Theoretically, all the generals are equal, but in practice, this is not the case.

The First Command is feared among the others, for it holds more greater baatezu than the rest. Still, to hear Dagos tell it, all three Commands share the same status. But each of the nine generals vies to make sure that Dagos's approving eye falls on *him*, rather than on his fellows.

THE FIRST COMMAND.



The First Command consists of all forces and elite units, the baatezu who establish beachheads and lead infiltration through tanar'ri encampments. The generals of the First Command are Alusiel (PI/δ baatezu [pit fiend]/HD 13/LE), Phanior (PI/δ baatezu [pit fiend]/HD 13/LE), and Galarond (PI/δ baatezu [pit fiend]/HD 13/LE). Alusiel dominates the other two simply by virtue of his age, incredible even among the baatezu.

The units of the

First Command get stuck with the hazardous duties — scouting missions, suicide runs, and the like. The turnover rate is high, but the rewards for a fiend who serves well in the First Command are higher than in any other. The baatezu in these units walk taller and swagger more fiercely than any others; they've earned it.

The First Command is made up largely of cornugons and gelugons, though a few units of barbazus serve with equal distinction. The entire group shares a camaraderie, uniting against any outside threats. The fiends in the Command won't go so far as to offer their lives for their fellows, but they do fight ferociously for their brethren.

THE SECOND COMMAND

The Second Command is led by Kobbis (Pl/♀ baatezu [amnizu]/HD 9/LE), with support from her seconds, Meathe (Pl/♀ baatezu [amnizu]/HD 9/LE), and Laginus (Pl/♂ baatezu [cornugon]/HD 10/LE). They're the admirals of the sea- and river-faring baatezu. But they also transport other Commands that need to travel via water, and thus are invaluable. Though the struggle for the Lower Planes depends not so much on the taking of the seas, the River Styx plays a vital role in the defense of Baator and the assaults throughout the rest of the Lower Planes. That foul waterway flows through three separate layers of Baator — Avernus, Stygia, and Nessus — and the Second Command's charged with making sure that both offense and defense go off without a hitch.

Most high-ups of the Second Command are amnizu, for they've more experience with the Styx than any other type of baatezu. And because amnizu often direct armies of abishai and erinyes, those two lesser fiends fill out the ranks of the Command.

A few osyluths here and there try to learn the twists and eddies of the Styx, and they become the boatmen of the baatezu navies. 'Course, no one knows the river like the marraenoloths, but since those berks stay clear of Blood War maneuvers, it falls to the osyluths to steer the Baatorian craft. Unfortunately, the bony fiends've been known to take wrong turns and sink entire battalions in the ever-shifting whirlpools of the Styx.

THE THIRD COMMAND

The Third Command falls under the primary control of the warmongering Bel (Pl/♂ baatezu [pit fiend]/HD 13/LE), who rules with his co-generals Meritos (Pl/♂ baatezu [gelugon]/HD 11/LE) and Hanariel (Pl/♂ baatezu [gelugon]/HD 11/LE). The group's made mostly of ground forces — the infantry

THE SIMPLEST METHODS

ARE OFTEN THE

MOST EFFICIENT.

— PEARZA,

INSTRUCTING HER

KOBRACHON TORTURERS

and the expendable lower ranks. Their mission is to wear down the tanar'ri through attrition and superior fighting skills.

As the rank and file of the baatezu forces, there's not much pride vested in this Command. Still, each unit looks to make itself known through force of arms and sheer cunning. Each individual fiend wants to make a name for itself, and they

all know that the best way to gain recognition at their level is to make sure that their Command achieves it.

The Third Command's troops are, for the most part, the mindless millions of lemures and nupperibos — Bel constantly scours Avernus, the first layer of Baator, for new recruits. But abishai and spinagons also make up a good chunk. And barbazus who weren't talented or canny enough to make it into the more elite groups fill out the remainder of the units.

◆ THE TANAR'RI ◆

Masters of chaos and purveyors of painful death, the tanar'ri rule the Abyss with savage whim and fierce delight. Full of hatred and bile toward everything that lives (and some things that don't), these fiends revel in anarchy and evil for the sake of their own twisted desires.

For the most part, though, they just rage. They drip with emotional venom — a nameless and formless flame burns within their spirits. Some scholars say that the reason the tanar'ri act the way they do is because they're trying to expel their fury and passion, looking to gain surcease through destruction. But the irony is that when they try it, they only fan the flames higher.

That, folks say, is why the tanar'ri are barmy. They can never hope to express themselves adequately enough to cast out their hatred and fear. A mortal can cry or shriek or kill and that's the end of it, at least for a time. A tanar'ri never finds that relief — the rage just builds and builds throughout the long years of its existence. Graybeards figure that only the suffering of others helps to alleviate the strain; that's why the fiends wreak so much havoc.

Some of 'em even paint themselves as tragic figures. But a body who's fooled by this should think again: The tanar'ri are in the Abyss because they *chose* to be, not because they're misunderstood victims. They consistently and thoroughly put their wants above the needs of others, and the only thing that cows them is the threat of power greater than theirs. The simple truth: They're selfish and evil scum, and if they suffer, they've brought it on themselves.

Besides, they *like* to kill and hurt. That drive overrides almost anything else in their existence; it's their one true love. Sure, they bury themselves in other passions, but their ruling desire is pain. If it soothes their own suffering, fine. If not, that's fine too; they inflict it on others just the same. And that should be more than enough to keep a sod from pitying the fiends.

It's been said that the tanar'ri are too chaotic to have foresight. Not so. They can act with logic and efficiency, sometimes in short bursts, sometimes making plans over long centuries. The tanar'ri tend to think of themselves instead of the larger picture, preferring to wallow in the heat of the moment. They have no armies in the truest sense of the word, just hordes of millions of fiends whipped into service by cruel axes and fierce wills. No central command leads their forces into battle; power rests with the true tanar'ri and the Abyssal lords, who often pursue their own agendas at the cost of victory.

A few scholars guess that, in the long run, the tanar'ri stand little chance against the cautious plotting of the baatezu. But others hold just the opposite; after all, the numbers of the tanar'ri are nearly uncountable.

They can afford to wage sloppy war.



RIISING THROUGH THE RANKS

The tanar'ri are nothing if not changeable; their forms are as mutable as the wind, and they constantly force themselves into new shapes and new powers. Unlike the baatezu, they have no set procedures for ascending from one rank to another.

Instead, their promotions hinge on belief — from candidate and judges alike. If a tanar'ri can convince its brethren that it's stronger, more cunning, and more powerful than they are, that perception eventually becomes a reality, and the fiend transforms. It's a strange mix of self-worth and posturing. In this way, even a lowly manes can rise up to become an Abyssal power. Granted, it'll take countless eons of sheer, unmitigated evil and the betrayal of everything the fiend holds dear, but in the quest for power, only the desire for *more* remains.

DIVISIONS OF POWER

Like the baatezu, the tanar'ri are broken into a rough hierarchy: least, lesser, greater, guardian, and true tanar'ri. But their rankings have nothing to do with standing in the Abyss, and everything to do with the sheer physical power at a fiend's command.

Among the teeming hordes of the Abyss, the least of the tanar'ri are the manes, the rutterkin, and the dretches — the most expendable fighters in the Blood War.

Actually, the manes aren't even considered tanar'ri at all by some members of the race — they're just mindless petitioners twisted into sickening shapes by the influence of the Abyss. Their only saving grace is that they're savage and unrelenting fighters, charging anything that's not a tanar'ri and tearing it to pieces.

The rutterkin share that mania; the misshapen humanoids roam the Abyss, attacking any unwelcome trespassers who cross their path. Cast out by their fellow tanar'ri, the ugly rutterkin aren't even made to fight in the war, serving only as guards on their home plane.

The dretches ain't much better than the manes or the rutterkin, but they at least can think and enjoy some status as tanar'ri.

Dretches serve both as food and as the primary infantrymen in the war; their pathetic numbers fill out the vast ranks of the armies. A dretch won't flee a battle if it spots a true or greater tanar'ri nearby — it wants to improve its standing in the eyes of its betters.

The next strata includes the alu-fiends, armanites, bulezau, bar-lgura, cambions, maurezhi, succubi, and yochim. Of these,

the last two play almost no part in the Blood War. The succubi instead serve their own desires in seducing mortals, free of the orders of the higher tanar'ri. And the yochlol — also called the Handmaidens of Loith — stick to the realm of their dark mistress, attending to the whims of the Queen of Spiders.

The alu-fiends act as mages in the war; their minor destructions win a few battles here and there, though most have little lasting effect. Nonetheless, the high-ups refuse to release alu-fiends from service. The alu-fiends may set out to be unreliable fighters on purpose because they resent their thankless duties.

When it comes to out-and-out battle, the galloping armanites and the berserker balezau are fearsome warriors. The former serve as shock troops, devastating enemy forces in quick aerial attacks — when they feel like following orders, that is. The dumb balezau are just as hard to control, but the minotaurlike fiends engage the baatezu with a relentless bloodlust that's truly frightening.

The bar-igura scout the enemy for the more organized armies of the Abyss, their chameleon skin acting as natural camouflage. But they only serve when commanded and compelled. See, the bar-igura just don't hate the baatezu the way other tanar'ri do. Fact is, they hate their fellow tanar'ri a good deal more, and prefer to live apart.

The cambions may be the most useful of all the lesser tanar'ri, which is ironic because cambions, born from human females, are despised as "half-breeds" by many full-blooded tanar'ri. But perhaps the fiends wish to prove themselves to their Abyssal fathers, or just find a valued place in tanar'ri society. In any case, cambions make excellent spies, infiltrators, and assassins.

Finally, the ghoulish maurezhi feed on the life forces of their fallen victims. Once they've eaten a foe, they gain its memories and can assume its appearance. Thus, the maurezhi are priceless for obtaining baatezu battle plans and sneaking into enemy camps undetected.

THE NABASSU

Although the nabassu fill no known role in the Blood War, the other greater tanar'ri — the babaus, chasme, goristroi, and waslrilith — serve with relish. Only the hulking goristroi are bred for battle, and smaller fiends often ride on the platform carried on a goristro's head. 'Course, using a goristro's a calculated risk, as it's just as likely to gobble up tanar'ri troops as baatezu.

The babaus round up the least and lesser tanar'ri, driving them toward the war to make sure that the baatezu are met by the greatest number of tanar'ri possible.

The chasme, on the other hand, don't compel lower fiends to fight — they just patrol for deserters, punishing any least or lesser tanar'ri who dares try to avoid the war. See, once a fiend's pressed into an Abyssal army, it's branded with an emotional scar that shines out like a beacon in the darkness of the Abyss. If a berk tries to give its troop the slip, a chasme can spot the scar across miles or even layers.

Only death — or the negation of the scar by a true tanar'ri — can free a fiend from the chasme.

Lastly, it falls to the waslrilith to repel all invaders that come

by water, gathering aquatic monsters to fight off the sea-driven Second Command of the baatezu (as well as any hydroloths hired to attack the Abyss). The waslrilith must also carry the fight to Baator, usually via the River Styx. The fiends've largely taken this duty upon themselves; they don't want to share the waters with *anyone*, and they war for superiority of the waves even amongst themselves.

GUARDIAN TANAR'RI

The only known type of guardian tanar'ri is the molydeus. Whereas the babaus ensure that all least and lesser tanar'ri fight in the war, the two-headed molydei compel the loyalty of the most powerful fiends — the true tanar'ri. Strangely enough, the molydei are empowered by the true tanar'ri themselves, though these guardian fiends are indebted to none. They live only to find and punish any true tanar'ri who shirk their responsibilities.

TRUE TANAR'RI

The greatest of fiends, most true tanar'ri — the balors, glabrezu, hezrou, mariliths, nalfeshnee, and vrocks — drive the Blood War. (Alkiliths are the only true tanar'ri that don't figure much in the fighting; they simply serve the Abyssal lords.) Lower tanar'ri are happy to hack away at each other in meaningless squabbles, but the high-ups see the threat the baatezu represent. They're sure those Baatorian leatherheads want to drive the passion out of violence, replacing it with cold, precise cruelty.

The mightiest of the true tanar'ri are the balors, the personification of the rage and passion that drive the race into frenzies of destruction. Caught up in their own spells of self-loathing and self-love, balors push themselves toward release and absolution. They won't find it, but their absolute devotion to the war effort often inspires their inferiors. Indeed, these fiends are the very heart of the Blood War, rousing all other tanar'ri to take arms against their opponents with murderous fury.

The canine heads of the glabrezu hide monstrous intelligence and cunning. These fiends are far more subtle than they look; fact is, they shoulder the burden of drawing strength from other planes (especially the Prime Material). The glabrezu tempt mortals into summoning them, and then sap power from the sod's plane for the betterment of the Abyss.

I'M STILL ANGRY.
I'D BETTER KILL A DÖZEN
MORE DRE+CHES.
— A CAMBION
IN THE ABYSS



The froglike hezrou enforce the will of the rest of the true tanar’ri, and see to it that lesser fiends form crack fighting forces. Without the hezrou, the balors and mariliths might bark orders that never reach the ears of their battle captains or get woefully misinterpreted.

The mariliths, the six-armed strategists of the Blood War, hold the second-most important seat in Abyssal society. They don’t inspire the same awe as the balors, but they’re terrifying in their own right. Shrewd and cruel, the mariliths are eager to betray and hurt, and their brilliant minds plan the complicated surges and feints of the tanar’ri troops. If the balors are the heart of the Blood War, the mariliths are its head.

The nalfeshnee are the judges of the Abyss. They decide which petitioners become dretches, which become manes, and which become rutterkin – all based on a spirit’s potential for evil. The bloated fiends boost or sap the intelligence of the newly formed tanar’ri. Thus, they really control the Abyssal end of the Blood War, for success depends on the quality of the recruits.

Finally, the vrocks make up the sterling fighting force of the Abyssal fiends. A gathering of vrocks (also called a *murder* of vrocks) can unleash crushing magic on its enemies, and its coordinated attacks are enough to give even the baatezu pause. Vrocks work together better than do the other battle-bent tanar’ri. Fact is, vrocks exhibit the only loyalty in the Abyss; they’re proof that tanar’ri can band together to form an effective team.

TANAR’RI NPCs

All true tanar’ri have individual names. Less powerful fiends carry names as well, but those of the true tanar’ri are names to conjure by, names by which spells can be woven. It’s not known if any of the following fiends have ever been summoned or bound, but they’re three of the toughest true tanar’ri in the war.

ILLSENDER

Illsender (Pl/♂ tanar’ri [balor]/HD 13/CE) is one of the most feared of all the balors. Unlike many of his brethren, he prefers fighting in the front lines to plotting and planning. Fact is, Illsender’s usually right in the thick of things, wreaking havoc and pouring forth his fury. A body can spot the fiend by the weapons he carries: the usual sword of lightning wielded by most balors, and the magical axe of a molydeus. (Illsender captured a molydeus – said to have questioned his loyalty to the cause – and imprisoned the berk in his tower on the 313th layer of the Abyss. The captive’s eyes fill daily with acid, but Illsender must keep him alive in order to wield the axe – if the molydeus dies, its weapon will vanish.)

When Illsender’s not in battle, he’s surprisingly civilized. His tower, though dark and dismal, ain’t the place of torture and despair a body’d expect, and unlike most balors, Illsender doesn’t kill folks for no apparent reason. Mortals

find him easily accessible, even affable. Though a flame always kindles behind his eyes, he’s pleasant enough company if a body doesn’t overstay his welcome.

TARAMANDA

The marilith general Taramanda (Pl/♀ tanar’ri [marilith]/HD 12/CE) remains cloistered within her sprawling fortress of Gallowshill on Blood Tor, the 13th layer of the Abyss. There, she admits none but her most trusted advisers (though she doesn’t even trust *them*), and anyone else she can exploit to carry out her twisted plans.

Taramanda’s got no desire to be a victim of the treachery inherent in the tanar’ri ranks. She saw her sister Alamanda die in the fall of Malevolus, and she knows full well the betrayals that stem from emotion. She’s vowed not to let it happen to her. (For more details, see *The Bargain*, the comic book included in the boxed set.)

In a sense, she’s already surrendered herself to failure; her advisers figure that her fear of being brought down means that she has a weakness they can find and abuse. For this reason, Taramanda’s begun to seek mortals as aides. They haven’t the experience of tanar’ri in planning the war, but at least their betrayals are easier to spot.

THE MARQUESS OF LOSS

The Marquess of Loss (Pl/♀ tanar’ri [nalfeshnee]/HD 11/CE) is a judge of the Abyss, one of the subtlest of the nalfeshnee who pass sentence on mortal spirits from the Mountain of Woe on the plane’s 400th layer. She maintains a long-standing enmity with the balors, but not such that they’re aware of it. See, she once had the chance to raise herself to balor status, but because it’d mean stripping away her essence, her intelligence, she refused the promotion.

Naturally, this cost her face and standing. The Marquess has since reconsidered her reluctance, but she’s not going to have the chance again for several millennia. Now she holds a grudge against Oulstra (Pl/♂ tanar’ri [balor]/HD 13/CE), the fiend who ascended in her place, and she does what she can to make his life miserable. For example, she actively seeks out the least fit petitioners and promotes them to higher standing than she ought, sending them to places near his territory. Oulstra’s army is slowly failing, and with it the strength of the Abyss, but the Marquess doesn’t care. All she wants is vengeance for a mistake she made. She’ll even recruit mortals to help foul the balor’s plans.

ABYSSAL LORDS

Above even the true tanar’ri sit the Abyssal lords. These beings have left the classification of type behind, achieving notorious individuality – each lord is truly one of a kind. Each generally rules a different layer of the Abyss, though they often war with one another over territory. The lords rank below actual deities in their destructive capability, but they’re practically immeasurable when compared to ordinary tanar’ri.

Some lords hate the baatezu more than the most hell-bent balor, and they throw their armies and resources into the Blood War. Others take an active interest in the war just because they see it as a ticket to gaining even more power in the Abyss. And still others could care less, struggling just to hold onto their power and realm. (For more information, see "Tanar'ri Priests" in the chapter titled "Infernal Magic," and "Wretches of Evil" in the chapter called "The Powers That Be.")

Graz'zt and Pazrael are among the most well known of the Abyssal lords, but that's probably because so many have only recently risen through the ranks. The new rulers are busy hunting portfolios and worshipers to expand their base of power, to plow their way out of the birdcages they've made in their souls. These lesser-known lords include:

ALZRIUS, LORD OF INFERNAL LIFE

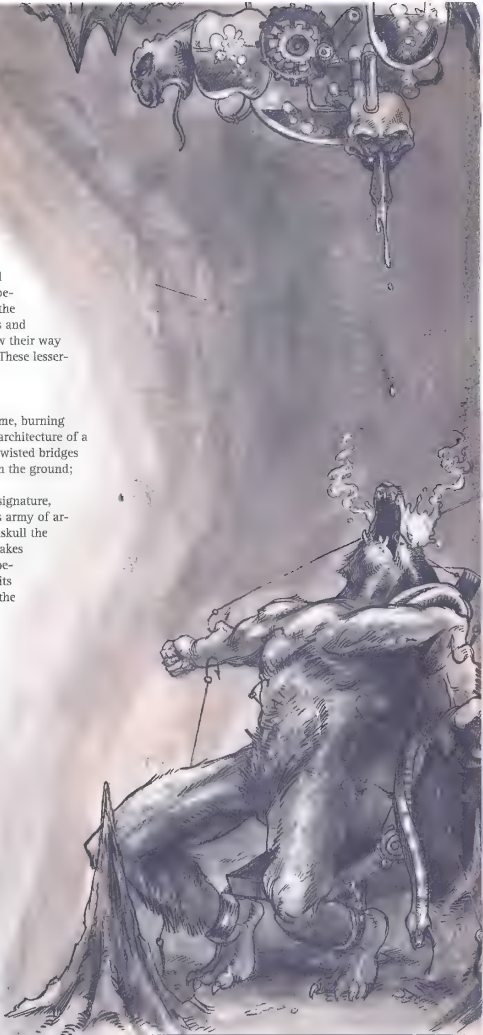
On the 601st layer (Conflagratum), a blinding flame, burning with a white radiance, emanates from the fluted architecture of a city long since fallen to the ravages of war. The twisted bridges and strange geometries of the city lie scattered on the ground; only the palace of Alzrius stands whole.

Alzrius has chosen the infernal flame as its signature, adopting the form of a dancing tongue of fire. Its army of armanites and babaus, under the command of Cleftskull the Blameless (Pl/3 tanar'ri [babau]/HD 8+14/CE), makes lightning-quick strikes into the Gray Waste and beyond, leaving a trail of flame and destruction in its wake. It's said that the fiends carry a torch from the body of Alzrius with them to spread its "word" wherever they go.

From time to time, Alzrius seeks out mortals, hoping to entice them to carry its flame to other lands and other planes. Once in a while, the flame incinerates its bearer, but Alzrius is usually magnanimous enough to let its servants live — if only so they can serve again.

LISAA'EER, LADY OF VENGEANCE

The acid-strewn clouds of the 27th layer (Malignebula) are home to the gaseous Lady Lissa'aere, a swirling funnel of malevolence and poison mist. Alu-fiends, nabassu, and vrocks make up her army, sallying forth only when the baatezu troops cross through Carceri and threaten the very borders of the Abyss (or when one of her rivals trespasses too closely to her layer's boundary).



No solid ground exists in the layer. Clouds harden into ice occasionally, but they melt through when too many tanar'ri cluster there to rest their weary wings. What happens to those who fall too far ain't known; some say that they're consumed by the mistress of the layer.

VUCARIK, CONSORT OF CHAINS

Unlike most Abyssal lords, Vucarik rules over no single layer, but instead roams the entire plane at his whim. The sounds of metallic rattling always precede the coming of the lord and his host. Wielding lengths of enchanted chain and covered from head to toe in rust-darkened metal, the battalion scours the Abyss (not to mention adjacent planes), seeking to inflict the tintinnabulous word of Vucarik on those who will listen.

The baatezu text *Deceptions and Stratagems* links Vucarik to the kytons of Minauros (the third layer of Baator), similarly chain-wrapped creatures who torture sods just for the thrill of the screams. If Vucarik truly is tainted with lawful blood, it might explain why he doesn't rule any layers of the Abyss. In any event, chant says that Vucarik occasionally hires (or at least doesn't kill) those he comes across, and sends them forth as heralds instead.



◆ THE YUGOLOTHS ◆

The enigmatic yugoloths are the third main race of the Blood War, but in some ways, they're also the first. Their records claim that their kind predates the baatezu and tanar'ri, and their motives remain dark — at least to anyone who's not a yugoloth. They're not born from petitioners; their numbers seem to remain the same no matter how many of them die. Their procreation remains a mystery — fact is, there's not a blood in the multiverse who admits to knowing much about the yugoloths.

Their race is built on bluff and bluster, subtlety and misdirection. They're alternately raging and oily, keeping all who would deal with them off balance. A body never knows where he stands; as neutral evil fiends, the yugoloths keep their true abilities and feelings hidden.

The 'loths are the hirelings and sellswords of the Blood War, the creatures who keep the balance of the war from tipping too far one way or another. To most eyes, they just sell their services to the highest bidder. But they've been known to turn stag on their clients when it looks like they could pull

in more jink by doing so. They've carefully cultivated a mercenary image, which keeps the baatezu and tanar'ri from trusting them fully and keeps the combatants dependent on the yugoloths for an edge in any given battle.

The real dark of it is that the yugoloths steer the entire direction of the Blood War. They've controlled the whole show from the very beginning, as a sort of grand experiment designed to ultimately strengthen the cause of evil. After all, it was the yugoloths' purge of law and chaos that first gave rise to the baatezu and tanar'ri (or so the 'loths texts claim). Ever since, yugoloth armies have moved in on key battles, ensuring that the war progresses in a way that pleases them. Though they may seem to follow the dictates of wealth and greed, yugoloth betrayals are actually carefully planned — they occur at key points in the fighting to swing the tide one way or another.

Yugoloths cast their nets of intrigue wide, often snaring folks who don't even know they've been caught. The 'loths have a plan for everything, it seems, and just when a cutter thinks he's got one backed into a corner, the tables turn. Remember, these creatures have been around for millennia — for eons — and they've got plenty of experience in bobbing any berk who's not peery to the point of paranoia. At times, they make the baatezu seem like witless children.

When player characters run into yugoloths of any status or power, the Dungeon Master should let the heroes think they've gained the upper hand on the creature in a series of building encounters. Only when the party thinks that the 'loths' defeat is inevitable should it reveal that it's been playing them all along. Obviously, this won't always happen; sometimes, even a yugoloth gets caught by the unexpected. But, in general, the yugoloths are masters of the long-range plan, and they do their best to avoid any situation they haven't orchestrated.

DIVISIONS OF POWER

At present, lower-planar scholars have only catalogued two main divisions of yugoloths, lesser and greater, although some argue that weaker 'loths created to serve a specific purpose should be classified as least yugoloths.

YUGLOTH CREATIONS

When a prime-material spellcaster summons a fiend from the Lower Planes at random — in other words, without invoking a specific name — he like as not ends up with a yugoloth. So, to keep themselves from being yanked around at the whim of mortals, the yugoloths whipped up a few breeds of 'loth that serve as summoning stock: the canoloths and the guardian yugoloths.

However, these creations also serve in the Blood War. The canoloths are hulking, bulldoglike trackers who snag prey with their sticky, barbed tongues (much like frogs do).

Commanders of yugoloth mercenary companies often employ canoloths as scouts and retrievers because the fiends are too thick-headed to be disloyal.

Guardian yugoloths, on the other hand, merely do what their name implies – watch over camps, prisoners, captured booty, and so on. 'Loth generals usually want every available fiend on the field or drawing up schemes, and they leave the unglamorous jobs like guard duty to the guardian yugoloths.

LESSER YUGOLOTHS

Though genuine yugoloths, these lesser fiends are really just the tools of their masters. They have little free will, existing only to serve the hidden purposes of the ultroloths and arcanaloths. Though they've the power to do as they like with their personal lives, inferior yugoloths must always answer the call of their betters (though they do so grudgingly). 'Course, if they ever gain enough willpower to take on the more powerful 'loths and win, they might be promoted in rank – after undergoing the appropriate rituals of pain.

At least six kinds of lesser yugoloths exist. They include: the mezzoloths, the rank-and-file, brutal soldiers of the yugoloth regime; the dergholoths, the second rank of soldiers; the pisoloths, the overseers of the two lower ranks and the 'loths most frequently bashed by their own inferiors; the hydroloths, the scouts and swimmers of the Styx; the yagnoloths, the cruel princes of the lesser yugoloths and the most despised 'loths of all; and the marraenoloths, the boat-men of the Styx.

All of these fiends serve the larger yugoloth purpose in the Blood War, but none are important enough to know the full dark of the plans. They simply move where their masters tell them, and settle for the knowledge that with enough intelligence, power, and cunning, they too can ascend to the rank of the greater yugoloths.

GREATER YUGOLOTHS

Three types of greater yugoloths are known to exist: the nycaloths, the arcanaloths, and the ultroloths. Each is important enough to deserve a bit of attention.

The nycaloths are the lowest of the bunch. In the Blood War, they act as scouts and observers for the other greater 'loths. See, nycaloths have gained the skills necessary to assimilate vast amounts of information and condense it into chant that the arcanaloths can use. As fiends go, they're usually incorruptible and almost always dead accurate. Most nycaloths realize the prestige of their rank, and don't want to jeopardize their positions by giving flawed reports. 'Course, a few inwardly boil at the thought of a so-called superior reaping the rewards of their footwork.

The next link in the chain is the arcanaloths, the masters of the bargain. They primarily serve as the go-betweens for the yugoloths, the baatezu, and the tanar'ri. As agents of the ultroloths' will, the arcanaloths ensure that the other fiends react as needed to steer the war according to the grand 'loth plan. The majority of the arcanaloths are based in the Tower of the Arcanaloths, hidden away in the wastes

of Gehenna, where they transcribe the records and contracts of the war onto the skins of petitioners.

As the contract-makers and mercenary-commanders of their race, arcanaloths have a great deal of pull in determining the nature and location of Blood War battles. With the stroke of a pen or the denial of armies, they can guide the baatezu and tanar'ri forces away from undesirable lands and toward battlefields that are more to the yugoloths' liking.

At the top of the heap are the enigmatic ultroloths – the greatest of the greater yugoloths, the captains of the race. They determine when the betrayals of the baatezu and tanar'ri occur; lay plans to bring the other fiends under their dominion; and scheme and plot among themselves to determine whose opinion ranks the highest in matters of guiding the yugoloths. Ultroloths represent all that lower yugoloths aspire to be, and they revel in the knowledge of their power.

Aside from those qualities, they're thoroughly wicked and cunning. They lay webs so elaborate that sometimes even deities are taken in. Ultroloths are passionate and passionless, full of hatred and yet detached. They're a paradox of order, an organized confusion, above both law and chaos. They're the children of evil, and their goal is to promote it as far as they can.

THE BAERNALOTHS

The reclusive creators of the yugoloths and purportedly the agents of pure evil, the baernaloths have withdrawn from sight, their existence now only a barmy's guess. Chant is that, back when the planes were new, the baernaloths set the course that evil (as a force) must take to overwhelm its primal enemy, and then left the actual details to their underlings. It's said that the baernaloths have long since vanished into the Gray Waste, and ambitious ultroloths often seek them out to make deals and learn the secrets of power. A few find the hidden creatures; most don't. Some never return.

Scholars of fiendish history argue about the baernaloths until they're blue in the face. Did the mythical beings truly envision the course of creation, foreseeing all the points at which evil could triumph? Did they create a race of fiends to manipulate and take advantage of such opportunities, and then disappear to see how their puppets fared? Did the baernaloths ever really exist at all? The dark of it's never been found – and it seems unlikely that it ever will.

MERCENARY COMPANIES

Yugoloth mercenaries have done more to control the tide of the Blood War than anyone suspects. Their appearances, their loyalties, their treacheries – all are guided by greater yugoloths, but without the talent of the rank-and-file, the war wouldn't be where it is today.

The 'loth mercenaries are among the most fearsome of fighting forces. Though organized, they're not without their own dreams of advancement and glory. They only work together in order to better themselves, which makes them ter-

riying in battle. Sure, they can act as a team, but they also think on their own, and that's a major element in the success of the yugoloth race.

The most common companies of 'loth mercenaries consist of hundreds of mezzoloths, scores of dergholoths, and a handful of pisoloths to keep the troops in line. Less common are the hundred-strong bands of hydroloths, with one of their number — usually the fiend slated for the next promotion — set above the rest to command them.

And then there are the *real* exceptions, like the Brigade of Darkness. This prestigious company was founded by a nycaloth who, after some serious scheming and promotions, later became the ultroloth known as the General of Gehenna. The Brigade takes the view that a combination of talent is the best chance for success, and counts ten of every kind of lesser 'loth under its banner (except yagnoloths).

The Brigade lies directly under the control of the hidden General of Gehenna, who has placed a loyal captain named Xell Dog-ears (PI/δ yugoloth [nycaloth]/HD 11+22/NE) at its helm. No other yugoloths have authority over the group, and the General occasionally has to take steps to remind its brethren just *who* commands the company.

However, the General does allow others to "borrow" (in other words, buy) the Brigade for temporary missions; the unit specializes in stealth and secrecy, and is a good choice for nearly any service a body needs. The mezzoloths, dergholoths, and pisoloths are remarkably sly and handy at toe-to-toe combat. The hydroloths shine when it comes to aquatic matters, and the marraenoloths can pilot the group wherever it needs to go.

Course, the General won't hire on with just *anyone*. Xell Dog-ears has complete discretion over which contracts to accept. Naturally, the price counts for a lot, but so does the nature of the job. Xell's often spotted in the Great Bazaar of Sigil, never far from the portal that leads to the lower-planar barracks of his soldiers. It's said that Xell's got direct access to the General's secret fortress; plenty of bashers'd love to pry the dark out of the nycaloth. But he's too peery to get scragged — thanks to his web of informants, Xell always seems to know when an attempt on his secrets (for his life) is coming.

YUGLOTH NPCS

As the chant goes, all yugoloths are tricksters. Many defy their superiors to gain a little extra power for themselves on the side. Those who actually are the superiors probably have several bobs in the works at the same time — schemes to increase their own standing at the expense of their fellows, or traps to drag berks dumb enough to deal with a 'loth into the clutches of evil. A body who deals with one of these fiends takes what he can get.

M'TRENZ R.O.

M'trenz Ro (PI/δ yugoloth [ultroloth]/HD 13+26/NE) is an ultroloth who travels from town to town on the Outlands, ostensibly seeking shelter from his own race — he claims they're out for his blood. M'trenz promises gold, power, and anything else within his reach to cutters willing to help him by undertaking special missions. Though the actual point of a job might not seem significant to the sod who takes it on, the ultroloth assures his hirelings that there's a reason to his rhyme. He claims to have an overarching plan, but says he can't spill it for fear of giving himself away to his pursuers.

The dark of it's that M'trenz does indeed have an agenda, but it ain't gaining freedom from his race. Fact is, he's even staged his own pursuit. His true goal is to lure bodies into the Blood War as yugoloth pawns. A few sods here and there eventually learn the truth, but by then it's too late. All they can do is lament their fate and try to escape (and even then are bent to the yugoloth's will). Other hirelings remain unwitting all their lives, a fate that more folks share than they know.

DUKE DYAVIN B'WH

Dyavin (PI/δ yugoloth [arcanaloth]/HD 12+24/NE) is a thin, almost skeletal arcanaloth, covered with stiff white fur. He's one of the many who toil away at the Tower of the Arcanaloths on Gehenna, his records essential to a thorough understanding of the yugoloth end of the Blood War. What his compatriots don't know is that he also helps out A'kin (PI/δ yugoloth [arcanaloth]/HD 12+24/NE), the smiling owner of the Friendly Fiend, a magical-trinket shop in Sigil.

When A'kin needs a document or a bit of hard-to-find chant, he calls on Dyavin. The shopkeep's got a hold on Dyavin, perhaps merely one of friendship — though it's barmy to think that friendship could exist among the yugoloths. In any case, Dyavin doesn't work for charity; he gets what he needs from A'kin in return.

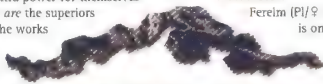
Don't get it wrong, though — Dyavin's evil, no two ways about it. He's scheming, cruel, and untrustworthy, and he'll seize a chance to toy with a band of mortals when he can. When he's seen on the streets of Sigil, it's usually near A'kin's shop in the Lower Ward, where he meets with some of the store's frequent customers.

NOTE: A'kin is featured in the PLANESCAPE™ NPC book *Uncaged: Faces of Sigil*.

FIREM CLOR

Ferelm (PI/♀ yugoloth [nycaloth]/HD 11+22/NE) is one of the lowest of the scouts of the

Blood War. She scribbled a chance at promotion into the ranks of the arcanaloths because she failed to spot scheming from below, thus losing face with her superiors. Now she's been assigned to watch the



DON'T WORRY, FRIEND.
I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I'M DOING:
— M'TRENZ R.O.
+ O A CONFUSED HIRELING

insignificant battles, with occasional jobs spying on the meatier clashes.

All this adds up to a nycaloth who's mightily discontent with her position. That means she quietly sells her chant to whoever fronts the most jink. Anyone seeking reliable word on the small-scale battles of the Blood War (which can be ten times the size of a battle in a *normal* war) goes to Ferelm. She's got a reputation among the underground of the war — the arms dealers and spies — as a blood who can dig up the dark, and that right quick. There've been no complaints about her service, which means either her information's as good as gold, or she peels her clients for all she can get and then puts them in the dead-book before they open their mouths.

Ferelm can usually be bought for anywhere between 100–10,000 gp worth of gems or magic.

◆ OTHER PLAYERS ◆

Though it may seem strange, other players — like the celestials, the slaadi, the gehreleths, and the modrons — do figure into the Blood War. They play not to win, but to see the fiends battle each other into oblivion. Some want to loot the battle-wrecked plains, others want to keep the fiends occupied and away from more peaceful lands, and some hope one side or another'll win, leaving only *one* host of evil to trouble the multiverse.

On a more personal level, most of these bashers find the war just plain offensive. The celestials hate it because it's evil, pure and simple — evil moving to give itself strength. The slaadi loathe it because it's the ultimate absence of individual distinction — all the armies swarming together leaves no room for a single cutter to step forth and prove itself. The gehreleth despise it because they're caught in the middle, their lands and numbers decimated by baatezu and tanar'ri onslaughts. And the modrons hate it because of the chaos that results from *any* war.

THE CELESTIALS

Archons, asuras, aasimon of all sorts — all upper-planar celestials see the hazards inherent in the Blood War and the danger should the fighting end prematurely. It's odd, but the celestials have the most vested interest in making sure the battles rage. Without the war to keep the fiends occupied, they'll surely turn their attention to other lands — perhaps even team up to attack the Upper Planes.

Yes, it's a pity that innocents drown in the swirls of the war, but their sacrifices serve a greater purpose. Even the chaotic celestials can see that, though they have a hard time accepting the *inevitability* of the death of innocents; many chaotic aasimon work to save any sods caught in the path of the fiends. The lawful archons undertake rescue missions as well, but with less diligence — they believe it's impossible to save everyone, so they focus on containing the war's spread.

Armies of celestials patrol the borders of their planes, watching vigilantly to ensure that no fiendish plotters slip past to harass the petitioners of light. Now and then, squadrons of celestials invade the Lower Planes to turn the tables. Those who volunteer for such missions are lauded for their sacrifice, for few survive. However, the strikes remind the fiends to stick to their own ground, and underscore that inflicting harm on the innocent does not always come without a price.

Occasionally, squabbling breaks out between the lawful and chaotic celestials, usually when it looks like the fiends are weak and especially vulnerable to attack. That's when the infighting erupts — which armies should the celestials hammer? The orderly archons call for the total eradication of the tanar'ri, for the baatezu are a foe they can understand and maneuver against. The asuras and the chaotic aasimon, on the other hand, can't imagine the triumph of law — which is what the victory of the baatezu would entail. They prefer the random actions of the tanar'ri, believing that chance should determine the fate of the multiverse.

Thus, the forces of good hamstring themselves just when they could make a decisive blow against their mortal enemies. In time, they may realize that the longer they wait, the less likely it is that the fiends will destroy each other. But until that day, the dogmas of law and chaos will split the Upper Planes as well as the Lower.

THE ARCHONS.

Mount Celestia boasts a battalion of trumpet archons commanded by Ysifeli (PI/♂ archon [trumpet]/HD 11/LG), a former throne archon who voluntarily accepted demotion so that he could take the war to the Lower Planes. Why'd he do it? Well, rumor has it that his blood boiled over with too much *hatred* of evil and not enough pity. It kept him from rising any further on the mount. So, to ensure that he could continue to serve the cause of goodness, he chose to fight against the evil he so vehemently despises. ('Course, if the tale's true, the archons probably wouldn't *want* him on the Lower Planes — with his capacity for hatred, he'd fall too easily into the trap of evil.)

Ysifeli's command consists of 1,000 trumpet archons who have volunteered to sacrifice their excursions to the Prime Material Plane to deal with the fiends when need be. These archons, collectively called the Sword of Vengeance, aren't as savage in their hatred as their leader, but they're just as determined to demolish the fiends. And though they claim to be above animosity, the truth is that they like to watch a fiend die spitting on the end of a sword just as much as the next cutter.

To be sure, other archon companies have formed for the express purpose of taking the battle to the Lower Planes. But none have been as successful as the Swords of Vengeance. 'Course, that may just be because few have ever returned to boast of their achievements.

THE ASURAS AND THE AASIMON.

These two races roam the Upper Planes, serving whatever powers will have them. Both champion the cause of good,

but they don't work well together – fact is, they hold each other in open contempt. See, they both fight for goodness, but each group wants to carry the banner. The chaotic asuras act singly or in hosts, doing whatever is needed to combat evil, while the aasimon (many of whom are lawful or neutral) focus on specific, well-planned missions. The two forces don't come to blows – they're too devoted to the triumph of good to imperil it with petty bickering – but they just don't see eye to eye.

'Course, there are exceptions. A band of asuras and aasimon, led by the impulsive Killianthys (Pl/♂ deva [astral]/HD 12/NG), have cast aside their differences to present a united front against the fiends – to let them know what's waiting

once the evil creatures finish their own squabbling.

This group, called the Wings of Glory, is officially outside the sanction of any races or powers of the Upper Planes. See, it's felt that the Wings of Glory might be one of the few things in the multiverse to strike fear in the black hearts of the fiends. Knowing that the forces of good are arrayed against them, the baatezu and tanar'ri might end the Blood War, which is really just a fruitless clash of law and chaos.

But such lofty ideals hardly matter to the Wings. They simply burn to slay fiends. The group travels to the Lower Planes in forces of hundreds (sometimes thousands) to lay waste as much as possible. Their band is good enough and fast enough that casualties are rare, and they've drawn the fire of both baatezu and tanar'ri. However, it's not been enough yet to turn the fiends from the Blood War.

The Wings of Glory, based on Bytopia, also occasionally accepts mortals who desire to bloody their swords on the bodies of fiends. But every mortal who applies faces a rigorous battery of tests to make sure he's up to par, *and* that he's who he claims to be – over the years, a number of immortals (including a few fiends) have tried to sneak into the ranks.



THE GUARDINALS

The guardinals of Elysium — beastlike humanoids that resemble human/animal hybrids — are among the staunchest aggressors against the forces of evil. They move to counteract the armies of darkness whenever they see a pressing need. However, the guardinals mostly stay in the wooded glens and peaceful hills of their plane, emerging only if evil gains too great a hand.

The race is known to be neutral good, which means that they attack baatezu and tanar’ri alike. Unlike some celestials, the guardinals don’t favor either side in the Blood War. But their neutrality leads some scholars to put forth that the guardinals are upper-planar counterparts of the yugoloths, with just as much mystery and guesswork behind their true motivations. A few graybeards have even penned essays suggesting that something *more* lurks behind the guardinals, some unknowable force that secretly guides the development of the race. As proof, they point to the fact that the guardinals don’t seem to push a long-range plan to promote goodness; they merely watch over Elysium and march on the Lower Planes every now and then.

The most famous guardinal strike force is a pack of lupinals — aggressive, wolflike hunters — who call themselves the Sons of the Silent Age. They pad stealthily through the gloom and hills of the Gray Waste in a dogged effort to bring their prey to bay. Led by Mowatt Ke’Mahn (PI/♂ guardinal [lupinal]/HD 8+4/NG), the pack of a hundred lupinals bands together once a month to harry whatever fiends they can lay their fangs on. Using secret portals on the Outlands, they travel far and wide to demolish the plans of the wicked. Though it’s rare for the Sons to come back with more than half the original party, every lupinal hopes that Ke’Mahn will choose him for the next hunt on the Waste.

THE ELADRIN

Of all the celestial races, the eladrin — the chaotic, faerie-like folk of Arborea — care the least about the Blood War. Oh, they defend their rolling plane against invasions of evil, but they rarely take the fight to the fiends in any numbers. If the baatezu and tanar’ri want to kill each other off, that’s just fine.

When mortals are threatened, though — that’s when the eladrin get involved. They feel that mortals have the right to forge their own destinies without the taint of fiends who promise riches but deliver only pain. But instead of riding into battle with swords held high, the eladrin prefer to make a difference subtly, one at a time, through individual actions. A greater eladrin might work behind the scenes for years on a prime-material world to fend off the influence of a single cornugon or nabassu, with the mortals never the wiser.

THE SLAADI

As creatures of elemental chaos, the slaadi have a strong interest in making sure the baatezu don’t gain an upper hand in the war. The triumph of the baatezu means a triumph of law, which means a loss of the glories of chaos — and possible trouble for Limbo, the slaadi’s primordial home.

Of course, the slaadi aren’t organized enough to devote any serious armies to the war effort. Fact is, sometimes they can’t even remember which side they’re on. At the Siege of Cathys, for example, the slaadi destroyed the scarlet battlefield, intending to help a hard-pressed tanar’ri troop. Instead, they got caught up in the fury of it all and helped the *baatezu* destroy the tanar’ri. The baatezu were glad for the aid. And when the last tanar’ri fell, they simply turned on the battle-weakened slaadi and tore them limb from limb.

On the whole, though, the slaadi fight to prove their worth, not to champion chaos as a philosophy. Slaadi war bands don’t coordinate attacks with the tanar’ri. They just push across planar boundaries when they feel the urge for battle and the need to test their strength. And that drive is powerful enough to ensure that somewhere, sometime, a slaadi band’s always fighting.

The warriors fight until they’re either killed or bored with battle. But sometimes, it’s whispered, the slaadi slink home, tails tucked between their legs, because they couldn’t match the raw ferocity of their fiendish opponents. These slaadi tend to vanish into the swirling soup of Limbo, there to practice their skills until they can overcome the fiends that defeated them.

All told, as a fighting force, the slaadi don’t make a tremendous difference in the Blood War. They much prefer to scavenge war-torn battlefields, eating the carrion and capturing wounded sods to further the race. See, they always need fresh, living bodies — red slaadi bury their eggs in the berks and wait for the babies to hatch. The hosts die in a grisly internal explosion, and the new offspring feed on the remains. And the slaadi aren’t particular; both baatezu and tanar’ri make fine incubators.

Sometimes, fiends pass their captives over to red slaadi forces — death by egg-burst is a gruesomely painful way to die. The slaadi themselves leap at the chance, because children born from fiend hosts tend to be stronger and more able to distinguish themselves. And if, for some reason, a fiend doesn’t prove a suitable host, it still makes a mighty tasty meal.

As a rule, the slaadi on Limbo are chaotic neutral, but it’s thought that those who spend time on the Lower Planes get corrupted. It’s no dark that the slaadi grow more cruel in order to survive those hateful planes, but none can say if the effect is permanent. The biologist Riantrek Jaa (PI/♀ tiefling/Believers of the Source/N) once set out to find a “corrupted” slaad and take it back to Limbo, to see if its essential chaotic nature would return, but she was never heard from again.

One of the strangest of her race, Grellon the Green (PI/♀ green slaad/HD 9+5/CN) is a green slaad of auspicious birth. Born from the body of a pit fiend, she's risen rapidly in power from the moment of her emergence in the world. But she's not like other green slaadi, for she's willing, even eager, to shield lower-planar travelers from the baatezu and tanar'ri. It seems that Grellon knows every cave and path on Gehenna, the Gray Waste, and Carceri, and she can get a body from one end to the other without bumping into so much as a gehreleth.

Some say that her penchant for charity is a logical result of her neutral nature — the pain and cruelty of the Blood War compels her to put right the balance. Grellon herself holds to this theory, speculating that, on the Upper Planes, she'd become greedy and hateful.

She spends most of her time on the Gray Waste, but a body can't find her unless she *wants* to be found. Travelers looking for her should pass the word on to any red or blue slaadi troops they encounter; if their need is great and true, Grellon's likely to make an appearance before long.

Both baatezu and tanar'ri send search parties to bring Grellon low, for she's sheltered many a cutter who's angered the fiends — even a few who've fled after inflicting grievous harm on the commanders of the armies. However, the rest of the slaadi are strangely protective of Grellon, and they draw and quarter any sod who tries to hurt her.

Some slaadi find themselves in the enviable position of being sought for their muscle and knowledge. A group of them, under the leadership of Gamp Laa'ren (PI/♂ blue slaad/HD 8+4/CN), has made itself available as mercenaries and guides for armies looking to move through a few of the chaos-leaning planes. It's said that the Company of the Twisted Egg knows the twists and turns of the Abyss (the upper 50 or so layers only), the howling caves of Pandemonium, and, of course, the swirling muck of Limbo.

The Company takes its name from the egg that hatched Gamp Laa'ren: it was deformed and left him with a permanent break in his right leg. Given up for dead by the rest of his band, Laa'ren's will kept him alive, and the blue slaad grew more powerful than any could've guessed. He eventually hunted down the leader of his former band and slew him, taking charge of the group. He's since turned it into a superb fighting and tracking force, one that holds well over 300 red and blue slaadi.

The Company even keeps its word, most of the time. After all, it's bad for business if Laa'ren can't keep his members in line, and any slaad who doesn't toe the line learns the cost of insubordination. Laa'ren rules through respect and fear, and none yet have matched his fierceness in battle.

A cutter can approach the Company with offers of food, captives, and valuables, but Laa'ren won't commit his slaadi unless the offer is greater than whatever amount he's got in mind (and his notion of a fair price changes radically to suit his moods).

In the grand scheme of things, the gehreleths don't make much difference in the Blood War. Only three kinds of gehreleths exist — the farastu, the kelubar, and the shator — and there are only 3,333 of each variety, bringing the whole race to just under ten thousand. That ain't much in the face of billions of baatezu and tanar'ri.

When the 'leths sense the war about to surge, they double their numbers in preparation for the carnage to come. But even twenty thousand gehreleths are still just a drop in the Abyss. Fact is, the 'leths — stuck on Carceri, one of the primary battlegrounds of the war — see their tribes slaughtered and their lands torn up far too often. When the baatezu and tanar'ri clash, they don't give a fig for anyone caught in the crossfire.

A few farastu here and there are bought or traded as mercenaries. But, as a whole, the gehreleths — even though they're chaotic evil — stay out of the war. Against baatezu or tanar'ri, the 'leths fight only to defend themselves (or to make first strikes to cripple a foe). As for the yugoloths, though, the gehreleths see nothing but red — they claw and spit until every 'loth in sight is dead.

Why such hatred? Sages in the know blame the creator of the gehreleths: the baernaloth called Apomps. Back when most baernaloths busied themselves creating and guiding the brand-new yugoloth race, Apomps brewed up the 'leths instead, and was exiled by its kind as a result. Vowing bitter revenge, Apomps took its creations to Carceri, where it filled them with a primal, lasting hatred for all things yugoloth.

The shator are the nobility of the gehreleths, and Narwhel's Claw (PI/♂ gehreleth [shator]/HD 15/CE) is no exception — he lords it over a large flock of enslaved farastu. The only difference is that his servants come in bottles. See, the farastu can liquefy themselves, and those loyal to Narwhel's Claw wait patiently behind stoppered glass, poured out when needed.

Lately, though, the shator's refuge on Minethys, the sand-whipped third layer of Carceri, has been troubled by one passing Blood War force after another (as it provides a bit of relief from the stinging winds). So he's glad to help anyone working against the baatezu, the tanar'ri, or the yugoloths. Narwhel's Claw even sells his bottled farastu as



"instant mercenaries." A cutter's just got to lob a bottle (or six) into a pack of fiends; once it smashes, the 'leth within reforms itself and tears into whatever's around. Even if the farastu stands no chance of winning the battle alone, it's sure to startle the fiends, and a timely distraction is often the difference between life and death.

THE MODRONS

Tireless servants of order, the modrons devote themselves resolutely to promoting law in the Blood War. Whether they aid the archons in plotting coordinated attacks on the tanar'ri, lend sheer numbers to the baatezu, or simply march on Abyssal strongholds, the modrons have no interest in seeing the triumph of chaos. To this end, they've created an army specifically to counteract the ravages of disorder from the war.

The Army of the Blood War (imaginatively titled, as are all modron armies) has close to a million members, all commanded by one hexton — a modron resembling a four-armed, two-tentacled humanoid with fanlike wings. The hexton's personal staff consists of one septon (the commander's second), three octons, and nine nonatons. The rest of the Army's rounded out with 36 decatons; 500 pentadrones; 6,400 quadrones; 32,400 tridrones; 202,400 duodrones; and 691,200 monodrones.

The force is separate from the usual 36 armies of modrons that watch over Mechanus, and it rotates through the command of 12 different hextons. Once a cycle, all troops and strategies transfer to the next hexton in line, which then adopts the forces and tactics as its own, with possible modifications based on new orders from above.

Though the leaders change, the basic components of the Army never do. Modrons who fall are immediately replaced by promotions from within or by reinforcements that arrive from Mechanus within days. Any modrons that are killed disintegrate instantly. Even a captured modron eventually disintegrates, its place in the ranks quickly replaced by another; thus, the Army's foes can't stop the modrons even by imprisoning each of the soldiers.



The Army of the Blood War can't be turned aside with bribes or threats, and the hexton commanders are ordered to annihilate any chaotic sods who block their path.

(Lesser yugoloths study with interest a monstrous pile of ashes on the first layer of Gehenna, said to be all that remains of a tanar'ri force whose captain defied the modrons.)

The current commander of the Army is

Yellowslash (PI/Ø modron [hexton]/HD 14+14/LN), who received its

name (and yellow markings) by an artistic mortal

with a flair for the dangerous. Yellowslash recently moved the entire Army from Baator to Gehenna, near a portal that leads to a battlefield on the Gray Waste — the modrons' next destination.

Yellowslash has orders to destroy any fiends that evidence disposition toward chaos, and to take and question any other berk passing within a mile of the modron camp. But prisoners might wish they'd been killed, instead. First, they're put through a maddeningly thorough grilling by the commander's nonatons. If a subject has any valuable information, he's then made to cool his heels for what seems like a year before Yellowslash itself launches another, even more intense interrogation.

The hexton seeks any chant regarding fiendish troop movements, and it often recruits able captives to spy for the modrons. Yellowslash is glad to pay out a reward for the information — after it's been confirmed (and re-confirmed) by modron sensory apparatus.

'Course, modrons are nothing if not efficient. In addition to stopping the fiends' chaotic flow of carnage, the Army of the Blood War tries to clear a path through the Lower Planes for the next Modron-March. Too many marchers fall to the fiends, and the modron god, Primus, wants something done about it.

Hal! You want to know the dark of the war? Then you're really Clueless. It ain't that simple, berk. A body can't just know the war, he's gotta be the war. Got to be in the swirl of things, right there, tradin' blows with all them other bashers that call themselves warriors. That's the dark of knowin' the war.

Reminds me of one time in particular, don't remember when or where — we crashed into this pile of baatezu scum, all lined up in their cute little rows, thinkin' they were so smart, just standin' there, waitin' for us. Well, we flew straight at 'em. I was near the front, hit 'em real hard-like and started pushin' 'em back. Yeah, sure, a bunch of us went down, always do, but plenty more of us were waitin' in the wings.

Suddenly, me an' some others found ourselves all separated from the rest, an' there they were, those soddin' baatezu scum, swipin' at us from all sides.

I just stood there, swingin' and swingin', not caring who I'm hittin', just slicing

through everything that gets in my way. Lots of 'em got up close enough to breathe on my feathers, tryin' to get into it with me, like it's somethin' personal, which it is, if you want it to be. Sure is for me, I can tell you, 'cause as long as a single one of 'em still stands, I don't really know if they're worth a spit, but it makes me have a bad day, but anyway, I realized they weren't in their sweet little lines anymore, that they were swirlin' around me however they wanted, and I hadda laugh at that, 'cause they're always flap-pin' their bone-boxes about how much better they are than us, how strict and straight, how they'll win the war 'cause they got so much discipline an' whatnot.

Don't remember how long we went on like that, and it doesn't matter one bit, anyway, but after a while, there were none of 'em left to kill, which made me kind of sad, 'cause I was gettin' into it pretty good. I started lookin' around, really checkin' things out, and it was just as dead as a tomb. I was standin' in the middle of nowhere, hip deep in bodies, without a single living thing within a dretch's throw. The battle'd gone on somewhere else an' left me behind. But I didn't mind, 'cause I figured that we must've really romped 'em. I flew for home, and never did find out whether we won or lost that day. But I knew the war because of it, an' that's the only way you're goin' to, too.

— Rr'e Idomas, Vrock and Murder Second of the Flock

To a prime or a casual observer, it might seem like the Blood War's nothing more than baatezu and tanar'ri hurling themselves at each other with a lot of genocide. But it ain't that simple. The baatezu put more thought and preparation into a single, strategic clash than most prime-material armies devote to a whole war. Even the tanar'ri practice the fine art of engagement in their own way — after all, chaotic doesn't mean dumb.

The war's about more than just killing, too. The physical manifestation — the battles and the bloodshed — is just a facet of the intrigue and counterplay of the war of beliefs. Remember, the planes run on belief. Even if the tanar'ri gutted the last known baatezu in all of existence, it wouldn't mean the Lower

TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

⊗ JUBILANT FLAMES!

⊕ REDOLENT BLOOD!

HEART BURSTS

NOT FROM PAIN,

BUT PRIDE!

— FROM A BAA+EZU

BA+TLE SONG


GE+ 'EM!

— A TANAR'RI

BA+TLE SONG.

IN ITS

EN+IRE+Y



Planes would be theirs. Both races look to prove that they can win and hold lands, thus swaying the beliefs of those observing. If one army can just get the rest of the multiverse to *think* of it as the most powerful, the most pervasive, the most deserving – well, that's when the rest of the Lower Planes finally might fall to Baator or the Abyss. It's a war for hearts and minds. Trouble is, the fiends often take that too literally.

◆ EMBARKATION POINTS ◆

When the tanar'ri march out of the Abyss and into battle, they usually embark from Durao, the 274th layer (by the Guvners' count). It's a tiny slice of the plane, consisting mostly of rusting iron streets and wharves wedged in between oozing swamps and the River Styx – the waterway that carries the troops to war. All new recruits get shipped to Durao, whether they're fiends pressed into service by the babaua that roam the Abyss, yugoloth mercenaries hired to aid the tanar'ri, or mortal slaves made to fight for something they can't possibly comprehend.

As the time for a battle approaches, Durao becomes a seething, swarming mass of fiends and other warriors, all packed so tightly together that there's literally no room for anything but standing. The tanar'ri mill about, growing more and more volatile as the crowds continue to thicken. Fights erupt everywhere, with tanar'ri beating each other to a bloody pulp; once started, a scuffle can quickly turn into a raging battle in its own right. On more than one occasion, hezrou captains have had to launch an invasion early just to prevent their own troops from annihilating each other.

When the soldiers are ready to move, they wend their way to their destination via the Styx (when they've struck a deal with the yugoloths and hired a few marraenoloth boatmen), through gates to the Outlands (when they want to surprise their foes by approaching from an unexpected direction), or along the Great Road that winds through each of the Outer Planes. Course, the method of travel depends on the location and nature of the battleground, not to mention advance scout reports on the enemy's position (though with the tanar'ri, that kind of information is ignored as often as not).

For the baatezu, embarkation is a more organized affair. Troops usually assemble in Avernus, the first layer of Baator, though occasionally sorties fly from Stygia, the fifth layer. As the army builds on the chosen mustering field, all fiends move quickly to their assigned positions. Everything is laid out in a particular order: Each of the Three Commands has a specific location on the mustering field, each company of baatezu has a particular location within its Command, and so on. This regimental system of placing the troops hasn't changed in eons, and all baatezu know it by heart, so it's an efficient way to gather masses for a coming battle. Any mercenaries, slaves, or unusual one-time allies quarter at a special staging area off to one side of the field – there's a level of pride in fighting as a true baatezu that the fiends don't share with hired help.

The Dark Eight themselves, coordinators of the Blood War, often survey the troops. The agents of Baalzephon dole out provisions, check weapons, ration food, and distribute whatever special equipment is needed. All the while, Zimimar's underlings move among the troops, preparing them in mind and spirit for the upcoming ordeal. The baatezu receive encouragement or threats as needed.

In the meantime, the rest of the Dark Eight meet to go over late-breaking chant dug up by Corin's agents across the planes. Dagos folds this new knowledge into his strategies for the imminent battle, adjusting orders to the generals of the Three Commands. It's a critical time in the preparations; all manner of information comes and goes, and the Eight strive to keep on top of things. Whether they're personally heading up the armies for a major conquest, or just issuing last-minute instructions for others before a minor skirmish, the pit fiends don't gloss over a single detail.

When all is in place, the forces of the baatezu move out, first by Command, then within each Command by company, and so on. As with the tanar'ri, they utilize the River Styx if possible (depending on their destination, their current relationship with the yugoloths, or their faith in their own osyluth boatmen). More often, however, they travel through the Outlands, along the Great Road, or via direct gates, hoping to arrive first and assemble in the most strategically advantageous location before the tanar'ri swarm the field and embroil it in chaos.

THE RIVER STYX

Putrid, oily, and as purple as a bruise, the River Styx serves a role in the Blood War that can't be stressed strongly enough. It's a barrier, a mode of transport, and even a means of destruction. In many ways, the memory-draining flow has come to symbolize the bitterness and corruption of the war.

The river churns through each of the contested Lower Planes, touching the first layers of Gehenna, Carceri, and the Gray Waste, but polluting several layers on both Baator and the Abyss. Thus, it is an invaluable tool (carrying an army into the heart of its foe's home), as well as a dangerous weakness (a significant break in each side's defenses).

The baatezu and the tanar'ri relish using the Styx to ferry their forces into their enemies' midst, but the waters flow both ways. Thus, they keep careful watch over the banks near strategically important

land. But it's not possible to post guards throughout Gehenna, Carceri, and the Waste — neither army can gain control of those planes long enough to set up permanent checkpoints. And so the fiends choose such locations to strike at each other.

Course, those who set off from their home plane on the Styx have no guarantee of reaching their destination. A boat never seems to follow the same currents twice, and only skilled pilots — like the marraenoloths — can navigate the swirls and eddies with any degree of reliability. But getting lost ain't the worst of it; the Styx is still a raging river, after all, and some say that it seeks to destroy those who dare sail upon it. Baatorian histories cover up accounts of entire fleets plunging over waterfalls or breaking apart on rocks because the osyluth boatmen took a wrong turn or misread a rising mist. Both baatezu and tanar'ri must trust the yugoloths for safe passage along the river, a trust that is given grudgingly and out of necessity.

Now and then, one side swings the dangers of the Styx in its favor. Take the Drowning at Khalas, for example —

baatezu troops pinned their enemies against the swirling waters, then drove the tanar'ri howling and shrieking into the depths. Many did drown, but many more simply went barmy from the prolonged exposure.



See, most fiends have to tread carefully around the fetid waters – one touch or taste can sap their memories as fast as those of any mortal. The plan-happy baatezu stand to suffer the most from such a loss; no gelugon wants to explain to its superiors that a unit lost a battle because the commander forgot the orders. But even dunking a baatezu and a tanar’ri in the Styx for a day won’t wipe away their mutual hatred. The bile’s just bred into their skins. Fact is, the lust to kill each other might be all they retain.

As per the Rule of Threes, only three types of fiends are immune to the river’s memory-draining power: the amnizu, the wastrilith, and the hydroloth. Because of their resistance, they often carry out special Styx-related duties. The amnizu guard the river’s spill into Stygia and lead the navies of Baator’s Second Command, often stocking their vessels with *desert’s night* (an intoxicating blossom from Set’s realm that can restore memories lost to the Styx). The wastrilith, on the other hand, love to capsize the Baatorian craft; inducing amnesia in hordes of lesser baatezu is a great way to bring chaos to their lawful foes. And the hydroloths make quite valuable hirelings for both sides of the war. Recent chant says the ‘lotus claim to be able to *teach* the process of resisting the river’s power.

◆ PLANAR DOORWAYS ◆

Some folks say that the baatezu and tanar’ri shouldn’t need to trouble themselves with the River Styx. After all, they can reach a destination instantly just by stepping through a portal (a planar doorway in Sigil) or a gate (a planar doorway anywhere else). But those methods of travel are fraught with dangers of their own.

THE PORTALS OF SIGIL

Plenty of fiends think they can use Sigil as a waystation – pop in through a lower-planar gate, then find a portal to where they want to go next. Because the Cage’s portals lead literally everywhere in the multiverse, routing through the city can often cut travel times by half or more. ‘Course, that’s only if the fiends know the location of the portal and its key. Many baatezu and tanar’ri spotted in the city are actually advance scouts digging up the dark of Sigil’s doorways from chatty or greedy natives.

On occasion, one side or another marches a large force through the streets, whether on its way to a portal or just looking for recruits, supplies, or trouble. But if the Blood War rears its head too prominently, the Lady of Pain usually sets things right – after all, it’s *her* city.

LOWER-PLANAR GATES

Blood Warriors don’t always cut through Sigil; much of the time, they travel via gates scattered across the Lower Planes. In general, the orderly baatezu make better use of gates. Finding them and dredging up the keys take me-

thodical study and exploration. Most gates are wide enough to allow just a few fiends through at a time, so only disciplined troops can avoid logjams. And keeping records of every imaginable detail about each gate takes patience and dedication.

The tanar’ri enjoy none of these qualities; they swarm to whatever gate’s handy, fight over who should procure the key, and probably couldn’t find the same gate twice without a yugoloth or canny planewalker to guide them. That may be why they use the *scythe of plane-opening*, a magical weapon that makes its *own* gates (see the next chapter, “Infernal Magic”).

On the other hand, the tanar’ri take better advantage of the element of surprise. When they storm through a gate unexpectedly, any baatezu troops nearby are usually caught off guard. But the reverse doesn’t hold true: the baatezu gain no upper hand by surprising their foes, as the tanar’ri just go with the flow and lay into the invaders.

‘Course, gates can spell trouble for both races. First of all, the doorways stay open for only a few seconds, and an army can use up a bushel of keys re-opening a gate until they all get through (it’s worse when the key is rare or valuable). And a unit might have to move through a number of different gates to reach its final destination.

Second of all, using a gate can be downright dangerous – the enemy might lurk on the other side, just waiting to spring an ambush. A single hamatula named Calca once held off an invasion force of over fifty thousand tanar’ri. They tried to pour onto Baator through a small gate, but the sods could only squeeze through one at a time. Calca just waited by the gate and killed each tanar’ri as it stepped through. The Abyssal force lost half its troops before their high-ups tumbled to what was happening and called a retreat.

Both sides have been known to use magic to foil the use of gates, too. A well-placed *wall of force* can invisibly seal off the area around a gate’s exit, so that fiends hop through only to find a dead-end – sometimes literally, such as when they all pile up against the *wall* and get crushed by those coming through behind them. And a large *cubic gate*, a permanent *teleport spell*, or other such tricks can see to it that any berk who emerges from a gate gets shunted through another and on to a new (and perhaps lethal) destination.

Finally, the Blood War means brisk business for mercenaries hired to destroy strategic gates in the enemy’s territory. Sometimes it’s as simple as tearing down an arch of rocks; sometimes a cutter’s got to use *planar wards* or other such magic to stop a gate from working. Naturally, the tanar’ri aren’t likely to honor their agreements with the hired vandals, and the baatezu’ll try to catch them in a contractual noose. But the yugoloths usually pay well and keep their word – they rely on gate-slammers in their effort to direct the course of the war.

SUMMONING ALLIES

In the midst of battle, it’s not always convenient to wait for reinforcements to trek over from the nearest gate. But most

baatezu and tanar'ri can call upon an innate *gate* ability to summon their fellows in times of need. The power works much like the spell of the same name: the fiend opens a temporary gate to another location and compels one or more creatures to step through.

'Course, it ain't as easy as that. The power works differently for each fiend. What type of baatezu or tanar'ri answers the call, how many of them come, how often the power can be used, the chance of the summoning's success — all these factors vary, depending on the might of the one who opens the gate.

Naturally, wanton use of the *gate* power can swell a battle exponentially. One fiend summons two more, who each call two more, who each call two more, and so on, and so on. . . . But it's rarely as bad as that. Most fiends limit their use of *gate*.

See, many can only use it once per day, and they don't want to waste it. Even if the summoning fails, the attempt still counts as a use. But even the fiends who can summon more frequently still hesitate before *gating* in reinforcements. They're not eager to become indebted to those that come through — the berks usually expect payment for their aid. And some high-ups simply don't want to show weakness; they'd rather die in battle than admit that they need help against their enemies.

◆ TELEPORTATION ◆

Imagine the chaos of fighting a foe who can disappear and reappear somewhere else, at will. Now multiply that by several billion — that's how bad the Blood War *could* be. After all, most baatezu and tanar'ri have an innate ability to *teleport without error*, just like the 7th-level wizard spell. But they don't abuse this power as much as a body might think; fact is, they often *avoid* hopping all over the planes.

Why? Well, for starters, they can't do anything for a minute or so after they appear at their destination — the trip takes the wind out of them. They also have no say in how they're facing when they appear (the fiends hate being put at their opponents' so-called mercy). And there are some highly magical places that are simply off limits to teleportation. For example, no one can pop into Oinos, the first layer of the Gray Waste — the fiends must reach that battleground by more conventional means.

Most importantly, though, *teleport without error* is something of a misnomer. When a fiend teleports to another location on its home plane, the power works just fine. But when teleporting to another plane, a fiend's got to know where it's going, or it risks appearing hundreds of feet above ground — or buried inside tons of rock. If the fiend has a crystal-clear picture of a very familiar destination, the power still fails 3% of the time; if it's never seen the intended site, the power fails a whopping 48% of the time.

Usually, the chance for error falls somewhere between the extremes. But the fiends figure they're pushing their luck

if they pop all over the place without care. They try not to teleport unless it's necessary. Oh, now and then a strike force jumps right where it needs to go, or a high-up blinks away when he's about to be ripped limb from limb by the enemy. But even the tanar'ri know that abusing *teleport without error* can lead only to trouble.

There's more. Recently, something's gone terribly wrong with the fiends' power to teleport. First, only newly created fiends found themselves without *teleport without error*. But then *all* baatezu and tanar'ri were suddenly stripped of the power. They don't know the dark of the trouble, but the fiends are too proud to admit weakness. They just pretend that they *choose* not to teleport about, often claiming that the act of physically crossing lower-planar ground somehow binds the land to their will (and whether that has any truth to it, none can say).

For more information about the fiends' loss of their teleport power, see "Squaring the Circle," in *War Games*.

◆ MAGICAL IMMUNITIES ◆

Most baatezu and tanar'ri enjoy some level of resistance to magic. This shielding helps protect a fiend from magical attack, but it also makes it harder to hit a foe similarly shielded. The chaotic fiends have the edge — balors, hezrou, mariliths, malfeshnee, and vrocks all have a resistance of 70%, and molydei shrug off a whopping 90% of all magical attacks. Greater baatezu, in comparison, resist magic only 50% of the time, but even that's nothing to sneeze at.

So why fight with magical items and spell-like powers at all? Well, a fiend never knows when it might get lucky — no foe is *completely* resistant to magical attack. And fiends have learned to wield magic in more creative ways. For example, commanders on both sides use *wall of fire*, *wall of ice*, and the like to form channeling boundaries that herd the enemy in desired directions. The baatezu, especially, find that a few well-placed walls of magical fire can funnel low-level tanar'ri toward Baatorian troops — a tactic called, appropriately enough, the Meat Grinder. Magical walls are also useful in protecting a formation's flanks from onrushing foes.

What's more, both baatezu and tanar'ri laugh off many other forms of attack, either completely immune or suffering only reduced damage. Neither race can be harmed by poison, for example, and each suffers half damage from gas attacks. These immunities often force the fiends to find other ways to cleave their foes, but they sometimes work to one side's advantage.

Take electricity and lightning — most tanar'ri are fully immune, while most baatezu are fully vulnerable. On the other hand, most baatezu can't be hurt with iron weapons, whereas iron pigstickers spill the blood of just about any kind of tanar'ri. Thus, whenever possible, Abyssal forces attack with lightning and Baatorian troops with iron.

Naturally, the fiends realize that many of their innate spell-like powers just aren't that useful in the Blood War. As

a result, some turn to casting learned spells like any mortal wizard. Others toil away at developing *new* innate abilities to replace those that've fallen out of favor. And that thought should be enough to send chills down most anybody's spine. (For more information, see "Fiend Wizards" in the chapter called "Infernal Magic.")

Note: The Appendix (pages 77–80) features tables that list the standard and special vulnerabilities of each type of baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloth.

SCARY MONSTERS

Many types of baatezu and tanar'ri command a form of magical *fear*. Some (like a rutterkin) have to touch the target. Some (like a cornugon) need only get close to the target. A few (like an erinyes) just have to be *seen* by the target. But the result is pretty much the same— if affected, the sod flees in terror.

Course, the key words in that sentence are *if affected*. And it doesn't have anything to do with overcoming magic resistance. In a huge, messy Blood War clash, with thousands of one side ripping into thousands of the other, the fiends are too battle-crazy to be driven off by any *fear* powers of their enemies. They're just not affected.

However, if two or three fiends bump into each other on the streets of Sigil and get into a brawl, they *would* be susceptible to each others' magical *fear*. On their own, in the Cage or anywhere else, they're just not whipped into the same protective frenzy that comes from indulging in a major battle.

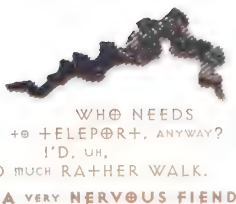
THE TACTICS OF ENCHANTMENT

An ordinary weapon that's not made of iron or silver'll do little against the baatezu or tanar'ri. Fact is, most fiends're struck only by magical weapons. Thus, all fiends— whether they fight with weapons or claws— must pay attention to the vulnerabilities of their foes.

Here's the Code of Enchantment, the rule that governs all beings in the multiverse: *Any creature that can be hit only by a weapon of +X enchantment can, in turn, hit a target as if it were a weapon of +X enchantment.*

For example, a barbaz is wounded only by a weapon of +1 or better enchantment. That means the barbaz has the potential to hit a target as if it were a +1 weapon, even if it's just fighting with fists and fangs.

The Code of Enchantment doesn't mean the barbaz can hit the target more easily, or that it can inflict extra damage when it hits (in game terms, it doesn't affect attack or dam-



WHO NEEDS
+0 +ELEPHANT, ANYWAY?
I'D, UH,
I'D MUCH RATHER WALK.
— A VERY NERVOUS FIEND



age rolls). The Code just says what the barbaz is *capable* of hitting. The boost isn't cumulative with other magic, either. If the barbaz carried a *long sword* +1, the weapon's +1 bonus isn't added to the fiend's inherent +1 enchantment.

Also, make sure to note the attacker's Hit Dice. Table 48 of the *DUNGEON MASTER®* Guide ("Hit Dice Vs. Immunity") lists the targets that attackers of various Hit Dice can strike. When determining a fiend's potential to hit a target, consider both the Code of Enchantment and Table 48, and apply the

better result.

The Code puts a whole different spin on the Blood War. Without the right magical aid, a barbaz can't hurt a balor, a glabrezu, or any other type of tanar'ri that is immune to +1 weapons. Simply stampeding a horde willy-nilly toward the enemy, slashing at whatever's around, is a horribly ineffectual way to fight— much of the time, the attackers just aren't going to be able to hit the foes around them.

That's why the tanar'ri haven't yet been able to win the war, even with all their overwhelming numbers. And that's why Baator's been able to hold its own. The baatezu have the wits to fill out their ranks just so— an osyluth here, a cornugon there— and send them into battle against chosen targets who simply can't hurt them.

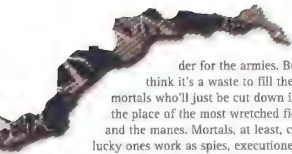
Course, one way around this mess is to outfit a unit with magical weapons that have enough enchantment to bring down anything. But neither side has that kind of arsenal at its disposal. Far more common are the *amulets of superiority* (see the next chapter, "Infernal Magic"), which make it possible for lower-level fiends to attack even the most powerful opponents. And, naturally, a creative fiend can neutralize a foe without causing direct damage— just wrap the berk in magical bonds, drop it off a cliff, bury it in a choking mass of manes or lemmures, and so on.

Note: Page 77 of the Appendix features three tables that list the attack capabilities of each type of baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloth.

◆ THE USE OF MORTALS ◆

Believe it or not, plenty of mortals— folks who naturally grow old and die, including both primes and planars— find the bravery in their hearts to deal with the baatezu and the tanar'ri. Some are mages who think they've got the spells to face the fiends and win. Others are sneaks who hope to sell dark secrets, unwilling to believe that their petty bindings are next to useless on the creatures.

Baatezu and tanar'ri alike *love* to deal with such fools. See, most mortals are weak and easily gulled; they make



excellent fodder for the armies. But some high-ups think it's a waste to fill the front ranks with mortals who'll just be cut down in a wink – that's the place of the most wretched fiends, the lemurcs and the manes. Mortals, at least, can think, and the lucky ones work as spies, executioners, assassins, and valued warriors in the field. 'Course, seeing as their most likely fate is death or eternal servitude, "lucky" might not be the right word.

COMBATANTS

Most mortals who throw in with the fiends are mercenaries, hard-bitten sellswords and spellslingers who don't care where their jink comes from. They're as treacherous as a yugoloth – just not as smart (or they wouldn't dare work for the fiends). And when the odd mortal here and there turns out to be a wizard of no small power, things *really* get interesting on the battlefield. Still, the sods don't know the half of what they're getting themselves into. At any moment, a fiend just might decide that a berk'd make a better meal than he does a soldier.

But the natives of the Lower Planes depend on mortals for a few select tasks. For example, many fiends who fall in battle regenerate and rise to fight again – unless, of course, they're dispatched for good. Mortals can help make sure a dead fiend stays dead by dousing it with holy water or whacking it with a holy weapon. Naturally, most bashers who carry such objects aren't likely to want to help the fiends out, but some are glad to oblige. They look at the big picture, figuring that they're ridding the multiverse of evil creatures – they just turn a blind eye to the fact that they're fighting alongside evil while they do it.

AGENTS OF STEALTH

Holy objects aside, mortal agents can do a number of jobs that fiends just can't, plain and simple. High-ups in the armies often send mortals out to reconnoiter the enemy or carry out assassinations. While fiends have the talent and guile to fulfill such tasks, they have a hard time getting near a hostile camp. Even if polymorphed, the slickest cambion in the Abyss would probably get scragged sneaking across enemy lines – most baatezu have *know alignment*, and plenty no doubt have magical items of *true seeing*. And, successful or not, a spy's likely to get caught and killed before he can slip back out. The high-ups hate the time and effort of training a fiend for a single-use mission.

That's where mortal agents come in. Not only are they more expendable spies than fiends, they can pass themselves off as friendly folk much more easily. And whereas one fiend can usually get a good sense of another fiend's mindset, a mortal is often unpredictable. They also tend to haul around an awful lot of junk – they always have some magical doodad or other to get a job done. Mortals make

excellent double agents for the same reasons, and a canny cutter might learn to play one fiendish army against another, reaping a nice bundle of jink for himself in the process.

When one mortal meets up with another at the scene of a Blood War battle, neither should assume that the other is just sightseeing. Each berk's probably out on business for the baatezu, the tanar'i, or the yugoloths, and isn't likely to place mortal loyalty over the promise of wealth or power.

SERVANTS AND BREEDERS

Not all mortals in the war are volunteers. Plenty get drafted because they botched a summoning, displayed prowess that a fiend thought it could exploit, or just wandered too near a lower-planar lair. Many are innocents, the ones with the sweetest auras, the ones the fiends delight in breaking and corrupting. A few eventually become the creatures' most avid slaves; most become nothing more than food for the larvae, manes, and lemurcs.

The unluckiest of all are chosen as breeding stock. The tanar'i, especially, dally with mortals from time to time to create more of their kind (no known types of baatezu derive from unions with mortals). Cambions, alu-fiends, and even tieflings further down the line are products of such couplings. The mortal partner almost always dies – females in the painful throes of birth, and males as soon as their seeds take root.

◆ BATTLE PLANS ◆

The tanar'i *have* no battle plans. They charge forward at the first sign of the enemy, heedless of their own comrades, intent only on taking the fight to their hated foes. The fiends hope to overwhelm the baatezu by sheer force of numbers, knowing that there are countless more of their ilk waiting to storm the field.

If the tanar'i ever stopped to consider a plan of strategy or agree on specific combat tactics, they'd have the capability of utterly destroying all baatezu in the multiverse – that's how significantly they outnumber the lawful fiends. But the fools don't, and never will; it's just part of their nature. (Folks across the planes thank their gods for that nature.)

Baatezu, on the other hand, can survive only if they carefully lay out battle plans. They prepare massive lines of defense, reserve forces, and highly maneuverable shock troops to outflank and crush the enemy. They love to employ tactics like:

- ◆ **THE RAIN OF DEATH.** The baatezu set up a deep line of troops – apparently weakened from battle – in full view of the tanar'i hordes. When the chaotic fiends rush forward to attack, baatezu flanking troops spring out of hiding to pin the tanar'i in on themselves. This works especially well because the Abyssal fiends, in their battle-lust, tend to lose track of who is friend and who is foe.

- ♦ **THE BROKEN WHEEL.** The baatezu form a line with their backs against an obstacle, then let the tanar'ri crash into the center of the line. The line bends and breaks with the attack, splitting into two halves, which wheel around and join at the other end. Thus, the reformed line of baatezu now pins the tanar'ri against the obstacle. This tactic has driven many an Abyssal horde into the River Styx, but the tanar'ri never seem to learn from it, and the baatezu never tire of using it.

S+RIKE FORCES

While baatezu leaders rely heavily on calculated strike forces to further their ends, the tanar'ri have little need for them – not to mention little ability to use them. Part of it's due to their chaotic nature, but much of it stems from the fact that there are so blasted many of them. Trying to sort them out and send them off into different directions is high impossible.

But the baatezu live and die by their strike forces – literally. They can't win a war of attrition, so they must wage a battle of wits. Most of their fighting's done before they even take the field.

Elite troops sneak into enemy territory regularly, both to scout out the tanar'ri's strength and to inflict massive amounts of disruption and damage.

Typical baatezu strike forces are made up of clever cornugons with a few savage barbazus sprinkled in for good measure. These teams are kept small, but charged with a great task – namely, to seek out leaderless herds of manes and dretches and destroy them en masse. According to the chant, several famous baatezu victories might not have been if strike forces hadn't crossed into tanar'ri territory and annihilated fully half of the chaotic troops ahead of time.

Such success is uncommon, though. The tanar'ri high-ups try to keep a protective eye on their cannon fodder whenever possible. 'Course, this might not stop a Baatorian strike force from wiping the leaders out, too.

REPORTS FROM +HE FRONT+

A body'd think that with the superior field command structure of the baatezu, they'd have a better understanding of just what goes on in a battle – that they'd react better to the tides of war. It doesn't work that way. In the swirling chaos of the

conflict, the reality of a situation rarely makes itself known until afterward, and even then it's not always completely accurate. Reports are sketchy and often contradict one another, troops report moving in a certain direction but are actually lost in a completely different location, head counts of the enemy are either wildly exaggerated or dangerously underestimated – it all adds up to chaos, the tanar'ri's best friend.

Naturally, the Abyssal fiends thrive on this confusion and disorientation. They don't care where they are, as long as they can fight the enemy. Their commanders just keep driving the soldiers forward, taking the fight to the baatezu, plugging holes with more tanar'ri. But not knowing what their foes are up to has caught them in many a bad situation. See, if baatezu flanking forces slip away from the main fight without being noticed, the tanar'ri won't go out of their way to look for the missing fiends. And when they do find the baatezu, it's too late – for the tanar'ri, that is.

♦ THE FIGH+ING ♦

So what does a battle actually look like once all the jockeying and assassinating and mustering are finished? Well, it's truly a sight to behold, though from a safe distance – say, a thousand miles away.

A Blood War battle is a maelstrom of gore and weapons, of spells and counterspells, of screams of agony and ferocity. First, the teeming throngs of the lowest fiends – lemures and nupperibos, manes and dretches – swarm into each other and mix like two colors of spilled paint, becoming a gray, pulpy mess of limbs and corpses.

Sometimes these front ranks are armed with magical weapons (in case they can get a swing at a powerful commander), but most of the time they simply rend each other the old-fashioned way, able to hit their ill-protected ilk with ease.

Next come the bigger guns. Wave after wave of reckless, wild tanar'ri crash headlong into steadfast rows of well-positioned baatezu, who cut the unruly hordes down and are overrun in turn. The careful observer might see the occasional commander succumb to the torrent of fiends, as often as not struck down by its own troops just for spite.

Unless one side or the other has an unusual edge – perhaps a yugoloth lending advice or aid – the fight's not likely to resolve much. The battle eats up most of the cannon fodder troops on both sides, along with quite a few of the high-ups, as well. When the dust clears, either baatezu or tanar'ri hold the field. But the glory is short-lived. Another army's sure to be on the way to change things around again.

AFTERMATH

Thousands or millions of manes, dretches, lemures, and nupperbos are slain during a typical battle, but only the dretches stay dead. The others have the capacity to regenerate in some way. Killing them doesn't do a lick of good in the long run; they'll be right there in the front lines again tomorrow.

Some of the higher-ranking fiends also regenerate, but that's not the worst of it. Most who die while away from their native plane simply reform back home (some keep the same rank, while most suffer demotions). They stay dead only if killed while on their home plane.

'Course, army commanders on both sides of the war know how to get around this and keep a dead fiend dead. Eating a corpse destroys the sod forever, and any tanar'ri or baatezu worth its salt has a voracious appetite. (Devouring a freshly killed manes can be hazardous, as it gives off acidic vapors when slain. Then again, many fiends like their meals with a bit of a flavorful kick.)

A good sprinkling of holy water or a few strikes with a holy weapon can also take a corpse out of the running for good. But no fiend wants to handle that stuff – it's like poison to them. Instead, they get prime-material hirelings to do the dirty work for them (see "Combatants," earlier in this chapter).

If any sods of the losing army are left standing, they quit the field and withdraw to lick their wounds. The winners like as

not haven't fared much better, but they can gloat about the victory, at least for the moment.

Still, there's no rest for the weary. Prisoners are rounded up to be interrogated, tortured, enslaved, or eaten. Each side either aids or eats its own wounded, whatever's appropriate. Naturally, "aid" means "kill." The fiends say that any berk weak enough to get wounded doesn't deserve another chance to fight. What they're probably neglecting to add is that they see the injured as an obstacle to their own advancement. Fact is, many fiends take out their own commanders in the hopes of rising in the ranks.

PRISONERS OF WAR

Taking prisoners is obviously far more common among the baatezu and other lawfuls than among the tanar'ri, the slaadi, and their ilk. But even the chaotic forces prize captives. Sooner or later, they're bound to nab a berk with a head full of useful chant, or a high-up who'll net them a hefty ransom.

The baatezu throw their prisoners into huge, well-regulated internment camps, where life is made as miserable –

and as orderly – as possible. The camps are laid out in symmetrical patterns that act as wards against escape, mental contact, and magical assault. Tanar'ri, yugoloths, mortals, and others are all penned in separately. The dull routines crush the spirit of most chaotic prisoners – or drive them to attempt an escape, which usually sees them in the dead-book.

Captives with some sense of order in their lives can fall into the baatezu regime and maintain themselves for a time. But the constant acts of cruelty – from pointless, debilitating labor to a lack of decent food – ensure that they won't stay sane for long.

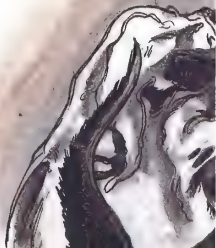
The tanar'ri camps are much more lax. The security's slipshod at best, as Abyssal guards are distracted easily by spur-of-the-moment ideas and diversions. But the teeming tanar'ri can afford to station huge numbers of guards, on the chance that at least a few of them'll watch for escapes or insurrections. And when the alarm sounds, *all* the guards swarm over the intruders or fleeing inmates. The fiends know that a breakout'll only invite the wrath of the true tanar'ri (or worse).

Not that escapes are common – the tanar'ri protect their cells with the same wards as the baatezu. Even worse, they lay their magic *everywhere*, not just in precise patterns. If a prisoner wants to leave, he's got to do it the hard way – through physical means alone. In a camp surrounded by tanar'ri, that's easier said than done.

Usually, neither baatezu nor tanar'ri rescue captured members of their own kind. Prisoners are looked on in much the same way as are wounded – if they didn't have the good sense to avoid capture, they got what was coming to them. Besides, even if a prisoner were worth saving, it'd be a waste of time and effort – most likely, a suicide mission. No sense throwing good troops after bad.

On the other hand, both sides indulge in supposedly civil prisoner exchanges, often in the neutral meeting grounds of Sigil. Neither side trusts the other, so they need to make sure switches happen fairly and without treachery. They're often willing to let outside parties – perhaps even player characters – adjudicate the deal.

Prisoner exchanges are excellent opportunities for diplomacy, discovery, or disaster; forgotten heroes of any side may come unearthened in the process. Even paladins lost to time have shown up in such trades, having held out against the tortures of their captors long after their followers gave them up for dead.



◆ WINNING THE WAR ◆

Primes who know just a bit about the fiends often get confused when it comes to the ultimate result of the Blood War. "After all," they cluck, "if there's an infinite number of tanar'ri, and a finite number of baatezu, well, the tanar'ri can't lose — not unless they're also infinitely *incompetent*."

For the most part, that'd be true — if the premise held. But planar scholars argue that the baatezu aren't so stupid as to fight an unwinnable war. They say that Baator's commitment alone is enough to prove that the numbers of the tanar'ri are *not* infinite, no matter what the bean-counters might think. Instead, these graybeards offer two possible schools of thought.

First, some claim that while the Abyss may indeed hold an uncountable number of tanar'ri, only a finite bunch — though one still staggeringly large — takes part in the war. The rest spend their time inflicting torments, capturing mortals, and jockeying for power.

But others say that argument's riddled with holes, that any subset of an infinite number must, by definition, also be infinite. These scholars claim that the tanar'ri aren't endless in or out of the Abyss; the fiends just *seem* so because they replenish their numbers with blinding speed.

Course, the only way to prove or debunk either of these theories is to gather all the existing tanar'ri in one place and try to count them. Until that day, the baatezu'll continue to wear away at their chaotic foes, sure beyond certainty that the war can be won.



Over the countless eons of the Blood War, the fiends have steadily come up with new and better ways to kill each other, crafting devices and magic limited only by their own poisoned imaginations. Indeed, whole legions of

fiends spend their entire immortal existences trying to fabricate new spells and items to lay waste to the enemy. Most never come up with anything new; many baatezu inventors lack creativity, and the tanar'ri are either too flighty to concentrate that long or produce items too strange to be of any real use.

Still, plenty of fiendish magic has seeped down into the hands of mortal primes and planars. Some of it's prized only by folks who are involved in the Blood War, and of little interest to anyone else. Some of it's quite useful.

But all of it's ripe for study, if only to see what sort of magic the fiends have thrown at each other throughout their long conflict.

See, in the war, there's no such thing as a secret.

As soon as the other side finds out about the enemy's latest magical toy, the dark

of it's broadcast across the

planes. Some hard-nosed berks make a living just spreading the rumors of new weapons and spells. 'Course, they're sometimes duped by a cleverly planted lie designed to throw the other side off balance. Both baatezu and tanar'ri hate being peeled by misinformation, and they're just the sort of sore losers who take it out on the messenger.

◆ MAGICAL WEAPONS ◆

The weapons of the war — glaives and daggers, whips and spears, metal barbs and chains — are far too many to categorize. Anything that could possibly be used as a weapon has, no doubt, been used at some point or another in the history of the war. Most of them aren't enchanted, and most are as transient in their utility as the lemures and the manes.

But some weapons are more permanent, and legends grow around them that fairly resonate with power, their very essences imbued with the magic of the planes and the might of the fiends. These weapons range from a simple enchanted dagger to a plane-opening scythe, and black-market traders seek them eagerly, as do a few "respectable" collectors. The planes are full of folk who'd love to own a small piece of the Blood War

— as long as it's the kind that just hangs quietly on a wall or sits in a trophy case.

THE DAGGER OF RA-TAN

Though it's really just a glorified dagger +2, the dagger of Ra-tan has quite a history behind it — several, in fact.

The one most bloods know goes like this: The dagger was forged on the Outlands and brought to Baator millennia ago by a paladin named Ra-tan. With righteous fury, the cutter tore his way through the fiends for 332 days. On the 333rd, Ra-tan came before the pit fiend Cantorum, founder of the Dark Eight — and plunged the dagger into the creature's heart, killing him in-

stantly. Despite such bravery, Ra-than did not return from Baator.

But a tattered journal recovered from the ice of Cania tells a different tale. According to that fiend-scrawled text, Ra-than met his end within an hour of reaching the plane. The *dagger* wound up in the hands of a red abishai who was angry with the rigid caste system of the baatezu. The underling – whose name was not recorded – drove the blade between the shoulders of Cantrum, who then slew the abishai in his dying rage.

Compared to most weapons of the Blood War, the *dagger of Ra-than* is plain, even weak. But it has tremendous symbolic value for the baatezu, who all hold fast to the legend in the journal. To the greater fiends, the *dagger* is a warning, a reminder that ambition and frustration can bring down even the highest among them. To the lesser baatezu, the weapon is a symbol of hope, a knowledge that with determination and bravery, even the weakest fiend can make a difference.

No one knows the present location of the *dagger of Ra-than*, though it's widely assumed to rest in Malsheem, the bloody fortress of the Dark Eight. No doubt the tanar'ri would pay dearly for it, if only to demoralize the hordes of lesser baatezu – and perhaps rouse them to chaos or rebellion.

THE GLAIVE OF THE BARBAZU

Originally created on Baator for the elite of the battle-crazed barbazus legions, the glaives have since become mass-produced and are now a staple of barbazus encountered anywhere.

The weapon consists of a long blade attached to a pole (somewhat like a spear melded with a sword). Both edges of the blade are serrated. The barbazus love to pierce the flesh of a foe with the blade's sharp point and then slowly but firmly turn the pole, carving the victim up from the inside. In any case, a blow from a glaive causes 2d6 points of damage, after which the wound bleeds for 2 additional points of damage each round until the gash is bound (or the victim dies). A barbazus usually likes to riddle its victim's body with multiple wounds, each of which cause damage until the bleeding is stanchied. What's more, all saw-toothed glaives are forged with a +1 enchantment to attacks (+3 when used in combat against a chaotic foe).

Sulfurous traders in the Bazaar of Sigil offer a glaive now and again, but the weapons are hard to come by. The barbazus carefully collect them from the littered field after an engagement. But legions that must flee the ground in a hurry may leave a glaive or two behind, as often as not stuck in the corpses of fallen tanar'ri.

THE SCYTHE OF PLANE-OPENING

It's been said that some weapons can rip open the fabric of reality, and the *scythe of plane-opening* is proof. When wielded in combat, it tears into foes much as any other type of scythe – causing 1d6+1 points of damage. But the blade grants the wielder a +2 bonus to the attack roll. And the weapon does more than rend flesh: leaders of Abyssal expeditions use them to slash the veil of the planes and create a temporary gate for the squad to move through. A *scythe* is especially helpful when the nearest existing gate is miles away, the River Styx not much closer, and mass teleportation not a viable option.

It doesn't function just anywhere; a *scythe* works only in a spot where the mesh of reality is already thin – where the philosophies of neighboring planes begin to overlap. The journey through the cut-open space is no picnic, either. The trip's about as fast as stepping through a normal gate, but the crossing is arduous and painful, causing 1d20 points of damage to each traveler. And the passage stays open for only five rounds.

No one's sure why only tanar'ri captains carry *scythes*. Perhaps the lawful baatezu can't stand the disruption and chaos inherent in cleaving space – those who step through a ripped-open gate have no idea where it'll take them. In any case, a *scythe of plane-opening* is never for sale, anywhere.

◆ MAGICAL ITEMS ◆

The magical items of the Blood War are many and varied. The baatezu and the tanar'i each claim to have invented the items described below, which may not be far from the mark — one side probably stole the secrets from the other, and both unveiled the object at the same time. Some are unique, while others are produced in such quantities that they're nearly common. Still, a mortal lucky enough to get his hands on one is a fortunate sod indeed — provided that the piece in question isn't tainted with a curse.

Few fiends want thieves using their precious property, and the creatures have enough magical power to graft hefty curses on the goods. A curse can take the form of a debilitating disease, the desire to return the item to its owner, a slow but radical alignment shift, or any other such nefarious trickery.

Fortunately, most of these curses die with their creators, so a troubled thief can try to find and slay the fiend in question. 'Course, a few curses are powerful enough to linger on after the creator's death, subsiding only if the thief completes a set quest or appeals to the right high-ups (perhaps even the Dark Eight or an Abyssal lord).



AMULET OF SUPERIORITY

When it comes to whole races of creatures that can only be hit by magical weapons or powerful enemies, lesser fiends need a way to balance the scales. Both baatezu and tanar'i leaders realized that a low-level fiend might get a killing shot at an enemy high-up now and again. They crafted the *amulets of superiority* to make sure that such a chance would never be wasted.

Whoever carries an *amulet* can strike a creature that's ordinarily hit only by magical weapons, even if the attacker has nothing more than his fists. The *amulets* come in three types, each more powerful than the last. An *amulet +1* — the most common kind — allows its owner to strike a foe who's normally hit only by weapons of +1 enchantment. The rarer *amulets +2* and *+3* let their owners strike creatures vulnerable only to +2 and +3 weapons, respectively.

The *amulets* don't increase a cutter's chance of hitting a target or the severity of the wounds inflicted (in game terms, they don't affect attack or damage rolls). They simply make it possible to strike foes that'd normally be out of reach.

The *amulets* are claw- or tooth-shaped chunks of tar-

formed stone, each with a tarnished metal wire wrapped around it. The wire keeps the stone from expanding any further and provides a constant flow of magical energy to the tar. The color of the metal usually indicates the strength of the *amulet*.

LADDER OF INFINITE CLIMBING

A *ladder of infinite climbing* is an exceedingly rare item. Only a hundred or so are known to exist, and they're jealously guarded by their fiend owners.

A *ladder* appears as an ordinary 15-foot-long metal ladder, though a bit sleeker and finer than most. Those that have seen much use are often pitted with acid scars and scorch marks, but these blemishes slowly vanish with time.

To use a *ladder*, a berk's just got to set it against a wall that has some permeability or friction on its surface and speak the command word (which is often inscribed somewhere on the metal). The *ladder* then sinks its essence into the wall and holds fast to the surface. Only a wall that is free of friction or too dense to allow permeability can resist the *ladder*.

When a body starts to climb the *ladder*, it snakes under itself, scaling the wall as its user does. The bottom rung crawls under the rest and moves to the top. Thus, the *ladder* can scale almost any wall, no matter the height. To dislodge the device from the wall, the user simply repeats the command word.

The only problem is that a *ladder of infinite climbing* can bear only two 6-foot-tall cutters (three, if they're five feet or less in height). It's not too useful for armies, but it makes small-scale operations, such as espionage or assassination, that much easier.

MARK OF INVISIBLE ALIGNMENT

A *mark of invisible alignment* can come in all shapes and sizes. The most common form is that of a simple, flawless gem shaped like a crystalline tear.

When the *mark* is placed on a body's forehead, it adheres to his skin and blends in, becoming invisible; only the wearer can see or remove it. More importantly, the *mark* masks the wearer's alignment; most spells or other magical means of detection show him to be of absolute neutrality. Only a *gem of true seeing* or its equivalent reveals the wearer's true alignment, although *detect magic* shows an ambience of spellcraft around the sod.

It's said that versions of a *mark* can actually make the wearer's alignment seem to be whatever he desires. In any case, both baatezu and tanar'i try to use *marks* to infiltrate the opposing armies (rather than depend solely on mortal agents to do the job). The spies usually betray themselves by their actions, but the *marks* keep them safe in casual encounters.

MIMIR

Everyone needs a good source of chant, and the easier it is to access, the better. The *mimir* fills that niche handily. It's a silvery metal device that lets a body record information and play it back when needed. When asked a question, a *mimir* spins and whirs, rises into the air, and speaks the answer (if it has one). *Mimirs* function only on the Outer Planes, and they're quite common in the lower regions.

Some *mimirs* are shaped like skulls, others like butterflies, rib-bones, leering imps — there seem to be no end to their forms. But no matter what its shape, a *mimir* can usually be identified by its iridescent metal. See, no one's ever seen the shimmering material used for anything else, so most folks guess that the odd metal is somehow formed in the magical process that creates a *mimir*. 'Course, the planes hold a lot of things that no one's ever seen. A sod who finds a silvery metal object and assumes it *must* be a *mimir* might be in for a nasty surprise.

In the Blood War, fiends use *mimirs* to store battle plans, maps of enemy fortifications, espionage reports, and recordings of torture sessions (music to soothe the commanders' ears). A cutter who gets his hands on the *mimir* of a pit fiend general could be well rewarded — as long as he knows where to fence the thing. If he takes it to the wrong party, he might find himself rewarded in a far different way than he anticipated.

SPIRIT-CATCHER

"Spirit-catcher" is an umbrella term to describe the items that fiends use to trap the essences of enemies, slaves, or same-side rivals. Some spirit-catchers constantly seek to draw the spirits of sentients into their cores, while others must be activated to do so. The spirit-catchers work along the lines of the *magic jar* spell, but the inhabitant trapped in the device can't break free unless specifically summoned by the owner.

Three times per day, the owner can call forth the victim, command him to perform a certain task, and then force the

sod back into the object. The prisoner's set free only if the owner consciously wills it so, if the spirit-catcher is destroyed, or if the owner tries to summon him more than thrice per day.

An imprisoned creature can try to resist the will of his master and refuse to answer a summoning. In this case, it becomes a battle of mental strength — a contest that most fiends seem to love.

To resist a summoning, the prisoner must succeed at a modified save vs. spell. To determine the modifier, both sides compare the sums of their Intelligence and their Wisdom (or Hit Dice for monsters).

Take the difference of the sums and divide by two; the result is the modifier to the saving throw. If the prisoner has the greater sum, the modifier is a bonus; if a lesser sum, it's a penalty.

For example, say a spinagon tries to summon a githzerai fighter out of a spirit-catcher. The fighter has an Intelligence of 12 and a Wisdom of 15, for a total of 27. The spinagon has an Intelligence of 8 and Hit Dice 3 (rounded down), for a total of 11. The difference of the sums is 27–11, or 16. Sixteen divided by two is eight — that's the modifier to the fighter's saving throw. And because the fighter has the greater sum (27), the modifier is a bonus; he gets +8 on his save.

Whether the prisoner's attempt succeeds or fails, he's usually punished harshly for daring to resist. Whatever conditions the owner inflicts on the outside of the device — holding it over flame, subjecting it to lightning, and so on — translates directly to the inside of the spirit-catcher as well. While such torments can't kill the prisoner (remember, the device holds only his spirit), they certainly can make his life



extremely uncomfortable. But recovery is quick; the prisoner heals all inflicted damage within 24 hours.

Spirit-catchers can take the form of amulets, brooches, bracelets, or even weapons. They're usually worn with pride — fiends like to parade their mastery to their fellows. Lesser fiends often scheme to own a receptacle that holds the spirit of a higher fiend, even though most can't begin to summon (much less command) the powerful creature trapped within.

◆ FIEND WIZARDS ◆

Although tales ripple through many prime-material worlds of fiends teaching mortals the art of evil magic, the dark of it is that the fiends learned much from mortals. See, while the baatezu, the tanar'ri, and the yugoloths've always had plenty of natural magical powers, they never had any concept of learning and casting spells — not until they stole the chant from others, including mortal wizards.

Fact is, the magic inherent in the fiends' makeup often lets them surpass their mortal counterparts in the wizardly arts. They usually refer to spellcasting as *learned magic* to distinguish it from their innate spell-like abilities. Fiend wizards are the bloods that create most (if not all) of the magical items that originate on the Lower Planes. What's more, they perform most of the magical duties required in their sorcery-reliant armies, fortresses, and cities.

Not all fiends can use learned magic — just those with greater-than-average intelligence (11 or higher). And of those, only one fiend out of every 20 encountered by player characters is a wizard.

As a general rule, a fiend can learn to cast spells as a wizard of a level equal to its Hit Dice, or a wizard of the level at which it uses its innate spell-like powers, whichever is greater. That limit is the maximum, naturally; the fiends don't *start* that high.

Most spellcasting fiends are mages, and a few're specialty wizards. But no matter what the school, they prefer spells that destroy over those that create, and spells that harm rather than help. 'Course, fiend wizards always have the right spell keys needed to make their learned magic work on their home plane.

Fiend wizards are never subject to the weapon or armor limitations faced by mortal mages. But becoming a wizard of 8th level or above means that a fiend must concentrate on studying tomes and neglect its physical prowess. Fact is, 25% of such fiends face a penalty of -1 to their attack rolls.

Note that fiends can temporarily lower their magic resistance at will, so they have no problem casting spells on themselves or on willing fiend recipients.

A fiend's learned magic disappears when it changes into a higher or lower form (for example, an arcanaloth mage loses all learned spells when it becomes an utroloth).

THE FOUR TYPES

After deciding that a fiend is a wizard and determining the creature's casting level, the DM must then decide the *type* of wizard — there are four different kinds. Choose a wizard type as needed, or just roll on the following table:

1-100 ROLL	WIZARD TYPE
01-40	Distorted
41-50	Unenlightened
51-90	Normal
91-00	Augmented

Distorted wizards are those that marred themselves magically in order to learn spellcasting. In effect, these fiends have lost their magic resistance — it would've blocked them from becoming wizards.

Unenlightened wizards are those that sacrificed part of their innate magical abilities, devoting the energies to spellcasting instead. These fiends have lost 1d6 of their spell-like abilities.

Normal fiendish wizards're actually nothing of the sort. The term just applies to fiends that have learned to cast wizard spells *without* giving up their magic resistance or innate spell-like powers.

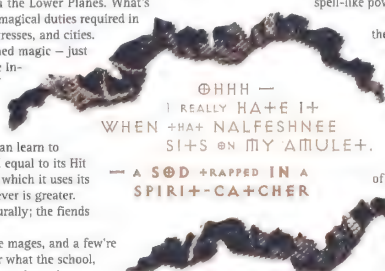
Augmented wizards are the masters of magic. Not only have they learned to cast spells without sacrificing any standard abilities, they've learned to alter their innate powers. Such fiends can replace any or all of their spell-like abilities with any other appropriate spell of a lower level. But mind that word *appropriate*, berk. See, a ralfeshnee can replace its *bind*


power with *magic missile*, allowing it to cast *magic missile* at will once per round. But the fiend couldn't replace its ESP power — which is always active — with *magic missile*, because the latter spell can't be always active.

BAA+EZU WIZARDS

Baatezu tumble to spellcasting easily. They find comfort in its structure (not to mention its potential for inflicting pain). Specialty wizards among this race usually take to the schools of alteration, invocation/evocation, necromancy, and illusion (but never wild magic).

Of all the baatezu, the amnizu are the most likely to





study the wizardly arts. They often specialize in the school of elemental water, using spell keys to wield their magic on the Lower Planes (water pseudo-elementals conjured from the River Styx are greatly feared). Erinyes also take to wizard spells, calling upon enchantment/charm magic to augment their already potent *charm* abilities.

The most fearsome baatezu wizards, though, are gelugons and pit fiends. Gelugon wizards are rare, but for each spell level gained, they earn one additional ice- or cold-related spell — *chill touch*, *fire shield* (*chill shield* version), *ice storm*, *wall of ice*, *cone of cold*, and so on. What's more, gelugons have researched and developed alternate "cold" versions of existing spells — *freezing sphere* rather than *flaming sphere*, *coldball* rather than *fireball*, and the like.

As for pit fiends, they're not limited by a maximum level of expertise — the more they study, the more they learn, reaching even 20th level and above. Pit fiends like to specialize in invocation magic.

Other baatezu don't usually become wizards of any great power. The odd cornugon mage is not unknown, but few put aside their physical training long enough to grow skilled at learned magic. Hamatula make poor wizards, though some practice until they can cast *fireball*, *flame arrow*, and other fire-based spells. Osyluths who become wizards usually specialize in divination magic, but, by and large, the bony fiends prefer to become clerics instead. And kocrachons study learned magic selectively, focusing on spells to hone their talents for torture.

The bulk of the remaining Baateorian fiends — abishai, barbazus, lemures, nupperibos, and spinagons — just don't have the brains to study learned magic.

TANAR'RI SORCERERS

The chaotic tanar'ri find it difficult to become wizards. Nevertheless, a fair share strive to overcome their unfocused nature and learn spellcasting, if only to wreak more chaos. Many tanar'ri wizards become wild mages, while others like to dabble in invocation/evocation or conjuration/summoning magic. Illusion (which is enhanced in the Abyss), abjuration, and enchantment/charm spells are often (but not always) too subtle for the fiends.

The most common tanar'ric wizards are cambions, even though they don't usually have the sorcerous might of some of their spellslinging brethren. Alu-fiends of genius-level Intelligence, too, study learned magic. They can become mages of up to 12th level, despite their Hit Dice, though they never become specialty wizards. It might be the innate mortal influence — each fiend has one human parent — that pushes cambions and alu-fiends toward spellcasting.

That's not to say that full-blooded fiends don't take to the art. Succubi make wonderful wizards, using spells to further their subtle, manipulative schemes. Glabrezu mages are known for their direct, destructive magic. Nalfeshnee wizards often focus their studies in necromancy, creating

undead servants to guard their horrible fortresses in the Abyss. Wastilith, naturally enough, specialize in elemental water magic, often going head-to-head against similarly trained amnizu.

A body's really got to watch out for balor and marilith wizards. Balors can rise up to 20th level, and sorcerous battles between spellcasting balors and pit fiends have laid waste to huge areas. Mariliths (who never specialize in any one school) have the rare and horrifying ability to cast a spell with two of their arms while making melee attacks with two others. Chant even says a few mariliths can cast two spells at once, but that seems to be more puffery than truth.

Vrocks are a special case. A singular vrock, no matter how smart, can't become a wizard. But a murder of five or more can collectively cast wizard spells if they've all studied them. What's more, the group gains spellcasting abilities of up to twice the Hit Dice of an individual vrock (in other words, up to 16th level).

Occasionally a mature nabassu takes the time to study wizardry, but the rest of the Abyssal fiends don't think much of learned magic. Babaus prefer more straightforward tactics; chasme and hezrou wizards are extremely rare; and molydei, alkiliths, and maurezhi never bother to take up the art.

'Course, that's their choice. The yochlol, on the other hand, don't get one — Lolth discourages her handmaidens from such study. And the rest of the tanar'ri — bar-igura, dretches, manes, rutterkin, and bulezau — aren't intelligent enough to become wizards even if they wanted to.

YUGOLOTH MAGICIANS

In general, yugoloths don't take to spellcasting as the baatezu and tanar'ri do. Most prefer to capture and enslave mortal spellslingers. Only the yagnoloths, the arcanaloths, and the ulrotholoths have the patience and the desire to master learned magic themselves.

Yagnoloths enjoy destructive, deadly spells like *lightning bolt* and *cone of cold*. It's possible that they take up the study in order to better protect themselves against other 'loths. Yagnoloths, after all, are the cruel princes of yugoloth society. Their tight control over vast regions of their brethren earns them much hatred.

Arcanaloths, the brilliant negotiators of their race, are natural mages. Virtually all can cast wizard spells at the 12th level of ability or above. Unlike the yagnoloths, arcanaloth wizards balance destructive spells with those for flight and protection.

Finally, despite their power and intelligence, ulrotholoths don't become wizards as often as a body might expect. Sure, a few study here and there, but most're accustomed to letting others do the work for them. Fact is, the ulrotholoths truly enjoy bending slave mages to their will, as it reinforces the fiends' sense of their own superiority.

◆ FIEND PRIESTS ◆

Natives of the Lower Planes have long had priests that serve the evil powers. Not many, of course — even fewer than the fiends who've studied learned magic. But the fiend priests've been around much longer than the wizardly spellslingers, and their abilities have nothing to do with chant stolen from mortals.

A fiend priest got to where it is by making a pact with an evil god, pledging to do the deity's bidding in exchange for raw power. Most often, a would-be priest who strikes such a bargain is bent on exacting revenge on a powerful enemy. The deal involves more service than worship — fiends never take up a god's robes out of true faith or sincere belief. Their motives're always dark, hate-filled, selfish and sinister. But the powers don't mind. It's always worthwhile to have an agent among the baatezu or the tanar'ri.

Course, the powers don't take just any berk. A fiend's got to have an above-average Intelligence (11 or higher) to become a priest. Of those that qualify, only one in a hundred actually chooses to serve a deity. A fiend priest can attain a level equal to its Hit Dice, though its god might allow it to rise to twice that level (if the boost serves the deity's need).

All fiend priests are specialty priests — after all, they make their pacts with specific powers. But they can *never* be druids; fiends're just too hateful and violent to be protectors of nature. And they don't face the weapon restrictions that hamper mortal priests.

In some ways, though, fiend priests are just like their mortal counter

parts. The strength of their powers depends on how far they are from the home plane of their god. Like many evil priests, fiends often take advantage of the harmful reversed versions of clerical spells — *dispel good*, *slay living*, *harm*, *unholy word*, *energy drain*, and *destruction*, among others. And, depending on the deity they serve, they have access to particular spheres of magic. (Fiends who can tap into the healing sphere cast spells to patch their wounds, and — very, very rarely — the wounds of others.)

Power keys, too, work the same for fiends as they do for any other priests — they enhance the effects of spells. But the lower-planar deities rarely waste them on the fiends. See, the gods know that their priests care more for personal power than for honest worship, and no god — evil or otherwise — wants to see its rare and mighty keys abused.

Unlike the wizardly arts, clerical spells never interfere with a fiend's normal innate powers and magic resistance. That's because the spells flow from an external source and require little study, practice, or sacrifice.

BAA+EZU CLERICS

The priests of Baator serve hellish powers like foul Set, battle-loving Inanna, Druaga (who fancies himself the patron of fiends),

Bargrivyek the goblin lord, and Kryn'n's Takhisis (as well as Tiamat, queen of evil dragonkind). Not many baatezu follow

the clerical path, though, and those that do skate on the fringes of their race's hierarchy. See,

Baator's high-ups don't much care for their lessers devoting themselves to the powers — they dislike anything that casts doubt on a fiend's loyalty to them.

Small wonder, then, that as a



baatezu moves up in the ranks, it casts away its clerical abilities and its allegiance to a god. By the time an up-and-comer gains the station of gelugon or pit fiend, it rarely retains any link to its former pacts of service. Cornugons are the only greater baatezu encountered as priests, and such a find is quite rare. The majority of baatezu priests are intelligent, ambitious lesser fiends — primarily, osyluths and hamatula. The others lack either the wits or the desire to don robes of service.

Baatezu priests don't usually wear symbols or designations that trumpet their allegiance to a power — such a display just ain't politically wise on Baator. Nevertheless, the priests don't shy from brandishing their clerical abilities, especially when in a position to show their peers that they wield power that's not available to others. Power, after all, is why the fiends became priests in the first place.

'Course, that strength doesn't come free of charge. In addition to whatever their normal duties might be, clerical baatezu're saddled with the secret agendas of their gods. The divine high-ups always seem to expect the priests to perform special missions. And, being creatures of strict law, the baatezu fulfill those obligations as effectively as possible.

Because flaunting godly loyalty is dangerous — and because the fiends don't place much weight on true faith in the first place — baatezu shrines are usually plain, hidden places, not ostentatious or showy in the least. The sites are just large enough for the priest alone to present itself before its power. The baatezu have no huge cathedrals or anything of the sort.

TANAR'RI PRIESTS

Of all the fiends, the tanar'ri count the most priests among their number. Their societal structure is far less rigid, so tanar'ri who pledge to serve a power don't need to worry about angering a high-up. 'Course, that same chaos means that the fiends aren't effective servants — they're unlikely to remain loyal to a chosen deity. Only direct threats from the powers' proxies keep tanar'ri priests in line. But the chaotic gods of the plane don't mind seeing their servants in the throes of disarray. And if a priest here or there turns stag, the Abyss always holds plenty of new recruits.

Unlike the baatezu, tanar'ri priests are eager to show their allegiances. The fiends don't just wear symbols like mortal clerics — they physically scar themselves with the marks of their deities. Some fashion weapons into the symbol or likeness of their power; others praise their god's horrid glories by screaming obscenities as they charge into battle.

Tanar'ri priests prefer to serve Abyssal lords that have ascended to godhood — Baphomet of the minotaurs, dread Demogorgon, faceless Jubilex, and the gnoll god Yeenoghu, among others. Lords who have not become true deities — such as Alzirius, Graz'zt, Fraz Urbliu, Kostchtchie, Pazrael, Sess'innek, Thralhavoc, and Zugtgmoym — can offer spells up

to only 3rd level (or 4th level if they appear in person). These lords attract followers among the lower-Hit-Die tanar'ri, who can't rise to high priestly levels anyway.

In the Blood War, tanar'ri priests often receive positions of command. The Abyssal lords and ascended gods like to have their direct — and very visible — servants at the forefront of an offensive. What's more, the priests attack clerics of other faiths (especially those of good powers) whenever possible in battle. The tanar'ri would love to get their claws on baatezu clerics, but the lawful fiends are too subtle about their allegiances to stand out as clear targets. So clashes between fiend clerics aren't as common as a body might think.

'Course, the powers of the Abyss are as numerous as they are foul, and some priests pledge themselves to one of the many nontanar'ric gods. Eshebala (foxwomen), the Great Mother (beholders), Laogzed (troglodytes), Lolth (drow), Kali (death and destruction), Umberlee the bitch goddess (the seas of Toril), Urdlen the Crawler Below (evil gnomes), Vaprak the Destroyer (ogres) — the list goes on and on.

No matter which power they're dedicated to, tanar'ri temples are abominable places of death, sacrifice, and torture. Often, they are huge sites of decadent debauchery, built on a grandiose scale that suggests a profane, desecrated, gothic cathedral that might once have been dedicated to a good power.

THE GODLESS YUGOLOTHS

The yugoloths don't seem to have anything to do with the dark powers — or *any* powers, for that matter. It's widely thought that no yugoloths have ever become priests, plain and simple. If any 'loth priests do exist, they're sure to be renegades and outcasts among their own kind.



◆ SPELLS ◆

The following spells were created by fiends, *for* fiends. Most were meant specifically for use in the Blood War, though the magic is becoming more common around the planes. See, when the baatezu whip up a new spell that crushes tanar'ri, they want *everyone* to get a hold of it; the more folks that can hurt the tanar'ri, the better. And the same is true with Abyssal spellcrafters.

Dungeon Masters can let their player characters learn the following spells, but the heroes shouldn't stumble across the magic lightly. Besides, PC wizards and priests won't

have the ability or the need to cast a few of the spells. After all, some of the magic is meant only to make a fiend tougher, and who but a fiend wants that?

Unless noted otherwise, a spell cast on a fiend must first overcome the target's magic resistance (unless the fiend allows the magic to take effect).

WIZARD SPELLS

This section introduces six new spells for mages or specialist wizards: *dark familiar*, *acidic blast*, *misfortune*, *reopened gate*, *chaos hammer*, and *waste-quake*. Most are available to player

characters, but the DM should make sure that the PCs earn any spells they find (perhaps they can discover a fiend's spellbook after a long and arduous adventure).

DARK FAMILIAR

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 3

Range: 1 mile/level

Duration: Special

Area of Effect: 1 familiar

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 2d12 hours

Saving Throw: Special

This spell works only when cast on the Lower Planes. It's similar to the *find familiar* spell, but it conjures a completely different kind of critter — either a quasit or an imp, depending on the alignment of the caster. Lawful bashers get an imp, chaotic berks get a quasit, and neutral casters have a 50% chance of getting either.

The familiar is identical in all other respects to one gained through the standard spell. 'Course, a dark familiar has a great deal more power to offer its master, and a great deal more danger as well.

If the spellcaster is an evil mortal, the familiar will serve him but eventually corrupt the sod even more (or turn stag on him, or both). If a nonevil mortal casts *dark familiar*, the quasit or imp attacks the leatherhead as soon as it arrives. And even if the caster succeeds in killing the evil thing or driving it back to the Lower Planes, he suffers the standard penalties for the death of a familiar.

The material component for this spell is one of the caster's fingers (or a similar digit if the caster has no fingers), severed by a silver knife.

ACIDIC BLAST

(Invocation/Evocation)

Level: 3

Range: 100 yards

Duration: Instantaneous

Area of Effect: 5-foot radius

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 3

Saving Throw: Special

In an attempt to develop a spell that'd be particularly effective against their enemies, the tanar'ri or baatezu came up with *acidic blast*. It hardly matters which side invented the spell — the magic was promptly stolen or copied by the other, and now each force has access to its power. But both races guard the spell desperately from any nonfiends. It wouldn't do to give the celestials or mortals such a powerful weapon.

See, acid is fully effective against both baatezu and tanar'ri, and *acidic blast* conjures forth a bolt of powerful, caustic fluid that emerges from the caster's hand with great force. The acid shoots in a straight line for up to 100 yards, and causes 3d6 points of damage to the target (no saving throw allowed). The splash also inflicts 1d6 points of damage to any sod within five feet of the target (a successful saving throw indicates no damage).

MISFORTUNE

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 3

Range: Touch

Duration: 1 turn/level

Area of Effect: 1 person per
caster level

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 3

Saving Throw: Neg.

This spell is much like the priest spell *curse*, but its effects last longer and often can be more deadly. Basically, it turns the target creature into a lodestone for bad luck and calamity. Each turn, there's a 25% chance that something will go wrong for the target. Magical items fizzle, spells go awry, ropes fray at critical junctures, a bruiser picks a fight with the target, and so on. *Misfortune* doesn't cause physical harm to the target; it just increases the chance of such harm coming from other sources.

The DM must carefully adjudicate the use of *misfortune*. One option is to impose penalties (anywhere from -1 to -3) to the target's attack rolls, initiative rolls, or saving throws, though not all three at once. But the best method is just to play up the ill effects that arise whenever the target tries to perform an action, from lacing up a boot to casting a complex spell.

Misfortune is a highly useful tool in the tanar'ri's infiltration and espionage efforts. A well-placed spell can cause

so many problems that an invading force can march in quickly — not to mention that the chaos unleashed is a source of glee to the fiends.

Misfortune can't be cast on items. To impart the power of the spell, the caster must touch or make a successful attack against the target.

REOPENED GATE

(Alteration)

Level: 4

Range: 0

Duration: Instantaneous

Area of Effect: Caster

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 4

Saving Throw: None

This spell is useful only to fiends or other creatures that already have an innate *gate* spell-like power. Most such beings have a limit on the ability — some can *gate* three times per day, others once per hour, and so on.

When cast, *reopened gate* gives the wizard another chance at using his *gate* power, even if he's already used it the maximum number of times in a given time period. 'Course, the spell doesn't guarantee that the subsequent *gate* attempt will be successful; it just lets the caster try.

For example, a chasme normally can use its *gate* ability three times per day. After casting *reopened gate*, the fiend can try to use the power again during the same day.

Note that some fiends — like *alu-fiends* and *cambions* — don't have an innate *gate* power. They gain nothing by casting this spell.

CHAOS HAMMER

(Invocation/Evocation)

Level: 4

Range: 0

Duration: Instantaneous

Area of Effect: 100-foot globe

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 4

Saving Throw: 1/2

The *chaos hammer* spell was developed by a mairilith named *Theiras* — a *tanar'ri* not known for her subtlety. Fact is, the *baatezu* have yet to develop a counterpart to this devastating offensive magic.

When cast, *chaos hammer* projects waves of concussive force in all directions from the wizard. The waves harm any sod in the area of effect who is of a lawful or neutral alignment. Victims suffer 5d8 points of damage (save for half) and must make a successful Strength check or be thrown to the ground.

Folks of chaotic alignment are immune to *chaos hammer*. The *tanar'ri* know that the spell won't bother them or their allies, so they cast it freely in the middle of a melee.

The material component for this spell is a bit of flesh from a lawful creature.

WASTEQUAKE

(Alteration)

Level: 9

Range: 1/4 mile

Duration: 3 rounds

Area of Effect: 10-foot
diameter/level

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 2 turns

Saving Throw: Special

Designed to work only on the Gray Waste, the *wastquake* spell is the province of powerful mages. Similar to the priest spell *earthquake*, *wastquake* opens the ground beneath the target creatures, causing it to buck and heave and create general mayhem.

The quake lasts for three rounds. During the first round, the ground ripples; any creatures standing on the surface must make a saving throw vs. paralysis at a -4 penalty. Those that succeed retain their footing; those that fail are knocked flat.

During the second round, a gaping rift opens in the soil of the Waste. Any creatures that were knocked down in the first round must save vs. spell at a -4 penalty or be pitched into the yawning chasm. Any creatures that kept their footing in the first round must save vs. spell at a -2 penalty or they, too, tumble into the fissure.

During the third round, the rift closes and the quake subsides. Creatures on the surface suffer no further damage. Any creatures that fell into the chasm suffer 15d6 points of damage. They're also buried below the ground, at a depth equal to the caster's level $\times 10$ (in feet). Those that still live can try to dig their way back to the surface.

Wastquake, oddly enough, does not affect permanent structures (such as those made of stone or wood), though it will consume tents and impromptu huts. Thus, a canny fiend can lure its enemies into the courtyard of its palace, then rip open the ground beneath them without worrying about damaging the fortress.

The material component of *wastquake* is a handful of soil from the Gray Waste. The wizard must shake the dirt in one hand while casting the spell.



PRIEST SPELLS

Of the five new spells in this section — *protection from silver*, *renewed ability*, *fostered protection*, *foesight*, and *inverted magic* — most aren't useful as any sort of direct attack against a foe. Instead, the spells allow the caster to beef up his level of protection (or that of another), divine the movements of an enemy, or call upon power he already possesses. Only the last spell (*inverted magic*) directly inflicts damage on a target, turning an opponent's protection against him.

As with the fiends' wizard spells, the Dungeon Master can make these spells available to player characters, as long as they earn them in valiant quests.

PROTECTION FROM SILVER

(Abjuration)

Level: 1	Sphere: Protection
Range: Touch	Components: S, M
Duration: 1 hour/level	Casting Time: 3
Area of Effect: 1 creature	Saving Throw: None

Most fiends (and perhaps even some tieflings) are especially vulnerable to silver weapons. *Protection from silver* does away with that vulnerability for the duration of the spell. If a protected creature is attacked with a silver weapon, the weapon is treated as if it were just a normal blade (or mace, or whatever it is).

The priest can cast *protection from silver* on himself or on another creature (by touching or making a successful attack on the target).

The material component of the spell is the priest's holy (or unholy) symbol.

RENEWED ABILITY

(Alteration)

Level: 2	Sphere: Charm
Range: 0	Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous	Casting Time: 4
Area of Effect: Caster	Saving Throw: None

Renewed ability can be cast only by creatures that already possess innate spell-like powers (as do most fiends). When cast, *renewed ability* lets the priest "recharge" one of his spell-like powers that normally has a limit on how often it can be used in a given time period. A power can be renewed only if it's identical to the effects of any wizard or priest spell of 3rd level or less.

For example, a cornugon priest normally can use its innate *lightning bolt* power three times per day. After casting *renewed ability*, the priest can use *lightning bolt* a fourth time that same day.

FOSTERED PROTECTION

(Abjuration)

Level: 3	Sphere: Protection
Range: Touch	Components: V, S, M
Duration: 10 minutes/level	Casting Time: 5
Area of Effect: 1 creature	Saving Throw: None

Fostered protection can be cast only on creatures that already possess some level of natural magic resistance. Other beings simply aren't affected by the spell.

When cast on a naturally magic-resistant creature, *fostered protection* increases the resistance by 2% per level of the caster for the duration of the spell. Under no circumstances can the target creature's magic resistance exceed 95%.

The material component for this spell is a drop of blood from a magic-resistant creature.

FOESIGHT+

(Divination)

Reversible

Level: 4	Sphere: Divination
Range: 1/2 mile/level	Components: V, S, M
Duration: 24 hours	Casting Time: 1 turn
Area of Effect: Caster	Saving Throw: None

Foesight lets the caster detect his enemies at a distance, giving him time to flee or prepare a defense. The effect is centered on the caster and moves with him, spreading outward with a radius of 1/2 mile per caster level.

If a being who means harm to the caster (or his group) comes within the area of an active *foesight*, the caster immediately senses the enemy's presence. After two rounds, the feeling grows in strength, and the caster knows the approximate distance of the foe, the general direction from

which it comes,
and the speed
at which it
travels.

The
spell does

not in any way identify the enemy or provide information on its strength. It does, however, give the caster a sense of the foe's numbers (whether it's one berk or an army). *Foesight* doesn't change based on the distance of the enemy — that is, the caster's sense of danger doesn't

increase as the enemy draws closer.

The reverse of this spell, *hidden hatred*, protects a body from being detected by *foesight* until he's within 10 feet of a target. At that distance, *hidden hatred* can no longer cloak the attacker's enmity. Although *foesight* works only for the caster of the spell, any creature can be the recipient of a *hidden hatred* spell.

The material component of *foesight* or *hidden hatred* is the caster's holy (or unholy) symbol.

Rumors exist of higher-level variants of both spells that affect more than one person — even whole armies, in some cases.

'Course, these stories are likely just pipe dreams or hollow threats.

INVERTED MAGIC

(Alteration)

Level: 5

Range: Touch

Duration: Instantaneous

Area of Effect: 1 creature

Sphere: Combat

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 6

Saving Throw: Neg.

This powerful offensive spell affects only creatures that have some level of natural magic resistance (which may include player character aasimar). *Inverted magic* turns that protection against them.

When the caster touches the intended target, he unleashes — and inverts — the inherent magical power within the creature. The target can attempt a saving throw to avoid the effects. If it fails the save, the creature is racked with painful energy and suffers a percentage of damage equal to its magic resistance. What's more, the sod is stunned for a number of rounds equal to the number of hit points lost divided by 10 (round down).


For example, a babau (which has 50% magic resistance) fights with a mortal priest until it has only 40 hit points left. The priest then casts *inverted magic* on the fiend. The babau fails its saving throw and loses 50% of its remaining hit points, bringing it to 20. In addition, the babau is stunned for two (20 divided by 10) rounds.

Another example: A black abishai (which has 30% magic resistance) has 20 hit points left in a scrap with a tanar'ri priest. The priest casts *inverted magic* on the abishai, which fails its save

and loses 30% of its remaining hit points, bringing it to 14. The abishai lost only 6 hit points, so it's not stunned at all (6 divided by 10, rounded down, is less than one).

The material component for the *inverted magic* spell is a silver holy (or unholy) symbol worth at least 100 gp. The symbol is consumed by the magic.





A number of battlefields in the Blood War have earned notoriety for particularly vicious or prolonged clashes. Most bashers avoid these places; there's nothing quite like the combined anguish of millions of fiendish spirits crying out to be avenged. But some sods are drawn to the battlefields of the war.

SITES AND SKIRMISHES

Sensates and other curiosity-seekers just want to walk across the lands that the fiends fought so hard and diligently over. Historians and generals like to study the tactics of the opposing sides, to recreate the battles in their heads and see if they could've done better. Most common of all are the slaadi and other scavengers who scour the blood-soaked earth for items of value. Their success hinges on who won the ground — the baatezu tend to clean up after themselves, while

the tanar'ri take only the most powerful or valuable objects left on the corpses.

This chapter presents seven major battlegrounds of the Blood War, along with each site's history and importance. It also takes a more detailed, play-by-play look at three other skirmishes in the war. These minor battles may lack the historical weight of the more well-known assaults, but a dissection of each fight from start to finish lays bare the fiends' twisted ways of thinking.

◆ THE FIELD OF NETTLES ◆

Every cutter who's heard anything at all about the Blood War knows the Field of Nettles. It's the single most famous battle site in the entire history of the war, a patch of untold destruction and death on the Gray Waste. The Field is bounded on two sides by the River Styx, which flows in both directions at the same time (on one side of the Field, the waters flow from Baator toward the Abyss; at the other, they churn in the opposite direction). The Field's not really a strategically important place, all things considered. But it's a handy spot to engage the enemy.

The Field of Nettles is a land of rocky ground, rolling hills, deep clefts, and sprawling patches of nettles that can grow up to 30 feet in height. The whole area is about 300 miles to a side. That might sound big to the Clueless, but many's the battle that spilled over into the foul waters of the Styx because 90,000 square miles wasn't enough to contain it.

The branches of the nettles are hazardous, inflicting 1d8 points of damage upon any sod that brushes up against them. Worse yet, the spikes are hollow — they actually drain the blood from whoever they prick. Chant says the nettles sop up all the fiendish blood spilled in this killing zone, and that's why the sodding plants grow so tall and ferocious.

Like the rest of the Gray Waste, the Field is colorless, a perfect backdrop to the grim spectacle of the battles fought here. Even when the site sees no fighting, slaadi and fiends pick among the countless corpses (piled high over the eons), looking for anything useful or edible. A careful searcher usually finds odd bits of armor or broken weapons nestled among the remains of the warriors who bore them long ago. The lucky and diligent few might even stumble across a magical item not recovered by the baatezu.

'Course, the Field ain't a leisurely shopping ground. A body's got to keep one eye out for fiend scouts moving through the debris, and the other for signs that the Gray Waste is sucking dry his very life essence.

For more chant on this hazardous battleground, see "The Field of Nettles" in *War Games*.

◆ MOLDRUS'S GAP ◆

Another foul battleground fought over for countless centuries is the vast swamp known as Othrys, the first layer of Carceri. The place holds little but insect-choked bogs, bottomless pools of quicksand, and ravenous prime-material trolls — the fiends find it perfect for fighting.

One heavily trodden stretch of the swamp is Moldrus's Gap, found near a main channel of the River Styx. It's a twisted maze of dry ground that threads between debris-strewn streams of brackish water and pits of green-glowing quicksand. Naturally, the tanar'ri love it. But the baatezu hate to fight here; the uneven and unpredictable ground plays havoc with their well-coordinated maneuvers.

The site earned its name when a mighty pit fiend named Moldrus [Pit fiend]/HD 13/LE led his troops into the swamp, hoping to catch a mustering force of tanar'ri unaware. Unfortunately for Moldrus, his informants were either leatherheads or traitors. See, he expected to find the Abyssal army in disarray. Instead, he was pinned between a swirling horde of battle-ready tanar'ri and the River Styx. The thick, sprawling swamp prevented Moldrus from using the time-honored baatezu trick of the Broken Wheel (see page 40), and he refused to teleport away and yield Othrys to the tanar'ri. Desperately, he sought a means of avoiding annihilation *and* winning the day.

Then a spinagon scout reported finding a small land bridge that'd carry most of the Baatorian troops to safety across a wide area of swampy ground. Moldrus ordered the bulk of his army across the bridge and commanded a light baatezu force to cover their backs. The tanar'ri didn't take long to crush the small unit left behind, but the fight bought Moldrus enough time to move his troops to higher, more solid ground.

Enraged, the tanar'ri crashed through the thick brambles and underbrush, heedless of the hazards of their surroundings. They swarmed toward the bridge — the gap in the swamp — only to be swallowed by quicksand, set upon by trolls lurking in the scrub, or felled by baatezu on the opposite shore (who were now able to form lines and maneuver). Before the day's end, Moldrus's troops stood victorious.

To this day, the baatezu and tanar'ri continue to war over the narrow stretch of dry ground that spans the open waters of the swamp. Moldrus's Gap is one of the only reliable connections between the shores of the River Styx and the greater part of Othrys. Fact is, any fiends looking to head deeper into the swamp usually sail the Styx, disembark at Moldrus's Gap, and cross the bridge. And as often as not, they're seeking the Stones of Draetilus.

◆ THE STONES OF DRAETILUS ◆

Deep within the vast swamps of Othrys is a small, open hill that rises out of the darkest, blackest water in the entire layer. At the peak of this hill stands a circle of stones that seems as old as time itself, as if it'd been set in place by an ancient power. The stones act as gates from Othrys to several other strategic locations, including Sigil, a cave in Mungoth (the third layer of Gehenna), and the Prime Material Plane.

Needless to say, both the baatezu and the tanar'ri would love to lay claim to this site. 'Course, it's hard to take or hold — after all, it's smack in the middle of a sodding swamp. There's just too little dry ground to fight on. No matter how many troops slog toward the hill, only a handful can engage the enemy at any one time. What's more, whoever holds the stones also probably holds the other sides of the gates, which means they can pull in reinforcements for forever and a day. And if they *don't* control the other sides, they won't hold the hill for long — not with enemies pouring through the gates to drive them back into the swamp.

The baatezu've tried once or twice to capture the hill and set up a permanent garrison to protect it. But the swamps of Othrys aren't the most hospitable place to spend time. Sooner or later, trolls (or

worse) lay into the troops stationed there. Or Cronus himself — the greater titan imprisoned on the layer — razes the garrison, figuring that if he can't use the gates, he'll see to it that no fiends get to use them, either.

◆ THE BRIDGE AT KHALAS ◆

Few battle sites are more perilous than the bridge that spans the River Styx in Khalas, the first layer of Gehenna. It's the only known means of crossing the fetid waters in the entire layer. The stone-hewn bridge is a glorious, soaring affair, almost 400 feet long, linking two sides of a steep-cliffed ravine.

The sharp slopes of the canyon are rough and rocky, with few paths and no vegetation, and the Styx winds its way along the bottom. Just downriver from the bridge, the Styx plunges over a waterfall and drops more than 1,000 feet straight down.

Most river travelers disembark before hitting the waterfall, though. Fact is, down below the bridge, a stretch of flat ground along one shore is the only spot in the layer where a vessel can safely pull ashore. From there, a meager trail winds up the steep side of the ravine, crosses the bridge, and continues on to other locations on Gehenna, including the Teardrop Palace of Sung Chiang.

It's no exaggeration to say that whoever holds the bridge holds Khalas. Those on the stone overpass can rain death at will down upon any party that sails the Styx and tries to disembark. And sods who sail through the ravine without stopping find that the current quickly becomes too strong to resist; they usually tumble to their deaths over the waterfall.

Any cutter tough and foolhardy enough to reach the landing site unscathed must climb the ravine to reach the bridge. All the while, he's in full sight of those up top. And even if he makes it to the bridge, he must fight his way across the whole, well-defended span.

In the entire history of the Blood War, the bridge at Khalas has been taken from below only twice. Each time, the attackers surprised the defenders and outnumbered them by more than ten to one.

The first great taking serves as a reminder of the wisdom of using combined tactics in a fight. A horde of tanar'ri held the overpass, with most of them farther along the path into Gehenna. Only a light complement occupied the bridge itself. The fiends held the trail for quite a way, along with most of the gates to and from Khalas, so it seemed any baatezu attack had to come from the River Styx.

The baatezu — sailing toward the bridge in fiend-packed ships — knew that, too. So they sent flyers up ahead to swing around and attack the tanar'ri from the other direction. The chaotic fiends fell for the lure. They moved many of their troops even farther along the path into Gehenna, sure that the baatezu attack came from deeper within the plane (perhaps from a newly discovered gate). The tanar'ri left only a skeleton crew to defend the bridge. It was then that the baatezu arrived en masse on the river below.

At first, the tanar'ri seemed likely to hold the bridge, despite their reduced numbers. They bombarded the boats with boulders and magic, sinking dozens and dozens of vessels and dumping their crews into the memory-draining waters. Some craft were swept farther down the river and pushed over the waterfall, the baatezu plummeting to their deaths on the jagged rocks below.

But the invaders kept coming. The baatezu goal was to get just a few troops ashore at the base of the ravine. The Styx was packed with ships, each stuffed to bursting with fiends, and boats that sank or plunged over the falls were quickly replaced. Abishai and other flying baatezu supported the river units by harassing and distracting the tanar'ri on the bridge.





The Abyssal defenders sent runners along the path to call back the forces that'd chased the decoy flyers, but a handful of baatezu finally made it ashore. They tried to take cover and work their way up the trail, making room for comrades to safely land their boats.

By this time, the tanar'ri on the bridge were dwindling in the face of constant aerial attacks. But they could still pour massive destruction down on the lawful invaders. Baatezu dropped left and right as they scurried up the trail, tumbling back down the steep slopes of the ravine. Still, for every one slain, six more took its place.

Then the first baatezu reached the top of the gorge. The attackers could now assault the tanar'ri on three fronts: from the water, from the air, and from the end of the bridge. Already too weakened, the chaotic fiends no longer had the numbers to bring any significant strength to bear against the baatezu. It was only a matter of time until the bridge fell.

Eventually, tanar'ric reinforcements arrived, as the units that'd run off into Gehenna started coming back in small clusters. But it was too late. The baatezu held the bridge and had enough troops on both ends to keep it.

It was a costly victory — a few hundred tanar'ri had destroyed over twenty times as many baatezu. 'Course, the cost wasn't nearly as dear as that suffered in the *second* great taking of the bridge of Khalas. But that's a tale for another time.

◆ THE SCARLET JUNGLE ◆

Cathrys, the second layer of Carceri, is both a wonderful and a terrible place to fight a war, all at the same time. The wonderful part is the vast, scarlet plains that stretch as far as the eye can see in the hazy, red light of the layer. The terrible part is the thick, impenetrable jungles, so dense and full of ichor that even tough-skinned fiends from the Abyss and Baator dare not enter.

Take the time a maddened, bloodthirsty army of tanar'ri and slaadi chased a battered and vastly outnumbered force of baatezu across the plains. The cornugon commander counted on using a hidden gate to Baator that he'd heard about from a yugoloth informant. But the chant was misguided or just plain false — the gate was nowhere to be found.

The baatezu chose to turn and fight. Knowing that they were wildly outnumbered, they took up a defensive position with their backs against a large stretch of jungle so they couldn't be outflanked and attacked from the rear. Clever

maneuvers could no longer help them, so great were their enemy's numbers. Instead, the baatezu entrenched as best as possible and prepared to take as many foes with them as they could.

In a flash of inspiration, the tanar'ri commanders decided to turn the tables on their quarry and surround them (as the baatezu often did to the chaotic fiends). Abyssal strike forces plunged into the jungle on each side of the baatezu position and hacked their way deep into its interior, hoping to swing around behind the entrenched fiends.

The jungle was more malevolent than they'd imagined. The sap of the plants was acidic, and the clumsy, thrashing tanar'ri were covered

with the stuff before they knew what hit them. Few, if any, survived.

The loss tipped the scales back in favor of the baatezu, who destroyed

the remaining tanar'ri, sent the slaadi fleeing, and eventually made it home.

Incredibly, the tanar'ri learned a lesson that day, and many centuries later, they turned a similar situation to their advantage. Again, an outnumbered and weary baatezu army faced certain destruction. Again, the commander put his troops' backs to the jungle. But the leaders of the Abyssal horde knew better than to enter the acidic jungle. Instead, they pushed forward in a steady attack, forcing the baatezu back until the lawful fiends had nowhere to go but into the killing brush.

Line by line, the baatezu broke and fled into the jungle, hoping to escape their attackers. They cut a wide swath through the dense foliage, only to succumb to its terrible acid. Each new line of baatezu pushed a little farther, but none — not one lawful fiend — reached the open ground on the other side.

THE STINGING SANDS OF ◆ MINEHYS ◆

This site isn't so much a battleground as a place of perpetual standoff. The howling winds and blowing sands of Minethys, the third layer of Carceri, plague fiends as well as mortals. Unprotected creatures can't hope to survive; the stinging sands strip the flesh from their bones in a matter of hours.

And yet baatezu and tanar'ri fight over this plot of ground like any other. Fiends who fall out of favor with their superiors (or who show too much scheming ambition) often end up serving in Minethys. But the layer sees no epic battles, just simple trench warfare. Both sides claim the blasted landscape, and they've dug in deep, both as a measure of defense against the enemy and as protection from the harsh elements.

It's a joyless assignment to be sent to Minethys. Days are spent digging and waiting, with little taste of the glory of war. Baatezu stare across an open stretch of sandy ground at tanar'ri, waiting for a break in the wind to swarm across and leap into the enemy's ditches to do battle. 'Course, it hardly matters who wins a trench, because beyond it lies another row of diggings, and another, and another, and so on. What's more, each side loses as many trenches as it takes, so the overall picture stays the same.

Guvners and barmy historians who travel to Minethys to chronicle events in the fighting come back disappointed (if they come back at all) — very little of note ever seems to happen. But neither Baator nor the Abyss would dream of giving up its claim to the prize. If they did, the other side might discover an as-yet unknown secret advantage to the place. Besides, it's a matter of pride.

THE BURNING GLACIER ☼ ◆ MUNG☼H ◆

Mungoth, the third layer of Gehenna, is as cold as the other layers are hot. Neither baatezu nor tanar'ri like coming here to fight (except for the gelugons, of course, who'd almost like living in Mungoth if it weren't for the acid in the snow). The layer has very little light; it's cooled off and doesn't put out much heat. Mungoth has no flat, stable places to stand, so many battle tactics are useless. What's more, the whole place is so brutal that it's almost not worth fighting over.

Still, the fiends have spent an eon or two clashing atop a large glacier that slowly grinds away at the surrounding mountains. The ice chunk moves as much as 30 feet in a day. It's one of the few spots in Mungoth with enough open space to actually array forces, but it's no less treacherous than the slopes.

Deep crevasses open without warning beneath a sod's feet, drop him into the black depths below, and then close again. And the surrounding bluffs let loose with mudslides at the most inopportune times, burying the unlucky beneath a deep blanket of muck. The best strategy or firepower doesn't decide the winner here — only the glacier itself can do that.

In one particular battle, the tanar'ri hired a large number of local yugoloths to stand at their side. Even then, they were outnumbered by the baatezu gathered at the far end of the glacier. To make matters worse, the baatezu had claimed an area containing an important gate to the first layer, Khalas, and they weren't about to give it up to come beat on the tanar'ri. They sat and waited, forcing the tanar'ri and yugoloths to march across the glacier — a perilous undertaking.

Sure enough, plenty of troops fell into the fissures, which are hard to see in the dim twilight of Mungoth. The attrition rate was high. And as the corners neared the baatezu position, the wind picked up, bringing with it the terrible black snow so well known on the layer. The

flakes and ice fell among the advancing troops, burning them with acid and obscuring their vision with ash. The footing grew even more treacherous, and the outcome looked grim for the tanar'ri.

Then the glacier rumbled with a sudden shift, and a wide rift opened between the two armies. The tanar'ri could no longer even reach the baatezu, and the battle appeared over. But the same seismic forces also triggered sweeping mudslides high up the slopes to each side of the baatezu position. The muck cascaded down and buried thousands of slow-moving baatezu, sweeping the rest across the surface of the ice and into the gigantic crevasse.

The mudslide wiped out the entire baatezu army. And as the mud hardened, it formed a causeway that the tanar'ri could cross to reach the other side of the rift and capture the gate.

Some historians say that the yugoloths knew a thing or two about the burning glacier and did something to trigger the whole catastrophe. Others claim that only a power could command nature in such a way. No one's likely to know for sure.

SKIRMISHES ☼ ◆ + THE BLOOD WAR ◆

Though some battles in the Blood War can dwarf any fought or even dreamed of in a prime-material conflict, plenty more of them're smaller melees. These tiny struggles rarely influence the fate of a layer or the course of an important event. Still, they contribute to the overall flow of the war and shouldn't be ignored.

The following pages detail (and diagram) three minor battles of the Blood War. The Dungeon Master can use this chant one of two ways:

- ◆ Treat the skirmishes as history, like the larger conflicts given earlier in this chapter. In this case, the battles merely show the kind of tactics fiends use when they fight.
- ◆ Use them in an adventure, and let the player characters get involved. The fiends might hire or compel the PCs to take part in a battle. The heroes could even get swept up in the fighting by chance, or try to avoid it entirely.

None of the fiends in any of the three skirmishes use their *teleport without error* ability. In the case of the assault on Carroristo (see the end of this section), a baatezu magical item blocks the power. But in the other two clashes, the fiends simply choose not to teleport.

Thus, the DM can set the first two scenes at a point in time after the baatezu and tanar'ri lose *teleport without error* (as detailed in "Squaring the Circle," in *War Games*).



HELL-BENT

The seeds of this skirmish lay in a baatezu raid on the Abyss, in which a small unit — under the command of the pit fiend Driin — eliminated a mass of manes and dretches before they could be mustered into an invasion force. In response, the tanar'i launched a strike into Minauros, the third layer of Baator, to kill Driin.

THEY
HAD ME
MOMENT
WAS GLORIOUS

— DRIIN.
COMMANDER OF THE
16TH STRIKE FORCE
OF MINAUROS

A yugoloth mercenary hired by the tanar'i turned stag and revealed the dark of the attack to the pit fiend. Driin readied a small force to meet the invaders at the spire called Rhel's Tears (named for the tearlike rivulets that continually seep from its surface).

The Abyssal team was led by a marilith named Esumkin. Aided by three alu-fiend sorceresses, she commanded four hezrou, 11 vrock, 23 chasme, and 106 dretches. What's more, Esumkin'd hired a unit of 50 mortal mercenaries known as the Angry Fist of Berran (named after a prime-material general of infamous atrocities). The entire force reached Baator through gates on the Great Road. Once in Minauros, they traveled quickly on foot — until they met the trap at Rhel's Tears.

Waiting at the spire were 30 cornugons, six osyluths, and Driin (see diagram 1). As the tanar'i and their allies approached, the osyluths formed a ring around the pit fiend. The cornugons then arranged themselves in a "v" formation (with the open end facing the tanar'i).

Esumkin ordered her fiends to charge the obviously outnumbered baatezu and tear the lawful berks apart — that's the Abyssal way. But as soon as all of the tanar'i entered the space between the two sides of the "v", half of the cornugons each created a *wall of fire*, with themselves at the center (they're immune to the harmful effects). The rest of the cornugons whipped up *walls of fire* behind the advancing tanar'i, effectively trapping them within a triangle of magical flame (see diagram 2).

The peel'd been sprung, and Esumkin knew the danger. She commanded her vrock to *dispel* the fire-walls rather than fly over them to attack, which was their instinct. Eight complied. The other three soared up and out of the triangle, and Driin quickly put them in the dead-book.

Many of the dim-witted dretches trapped within the *walls of flame* were dispatched by cornugon whips. Others marched blindly toward the fire; the hezrou stopped only a few from rushing into death.

The mortal mercenaries'd planned on defensive maneuvers only, and were peery about joining the fray. Esumkin ordered them to launch crossbow *bolts* +2 into the *walls of*

fire, hoping to keep the cornugons busy. But the baatezu decimated the Angry Fist of Berran with several volleys of lightning bolts.

The three alu-fiends tried to get to the heart of the matter. They used their *dimension door* ability to give the fire the laugh and attacked the osyluths surrounding Driin. The chaotic sorceresses cast powerful spells (*lightning bolt*, *ice storm*, and *hold monster*, for a start), most of which were deflected by the osyluths' magic resistance.

By this time, the vrock'd created a hole in the triangle of flame (see diagram 3). They, the hezrou, and the remaining dretches (who'd doubled their numbers by *gating* in help) tore into the exposed baatezu. But the cornugons had also *gated* in reinforcements: 15 more of their kind.

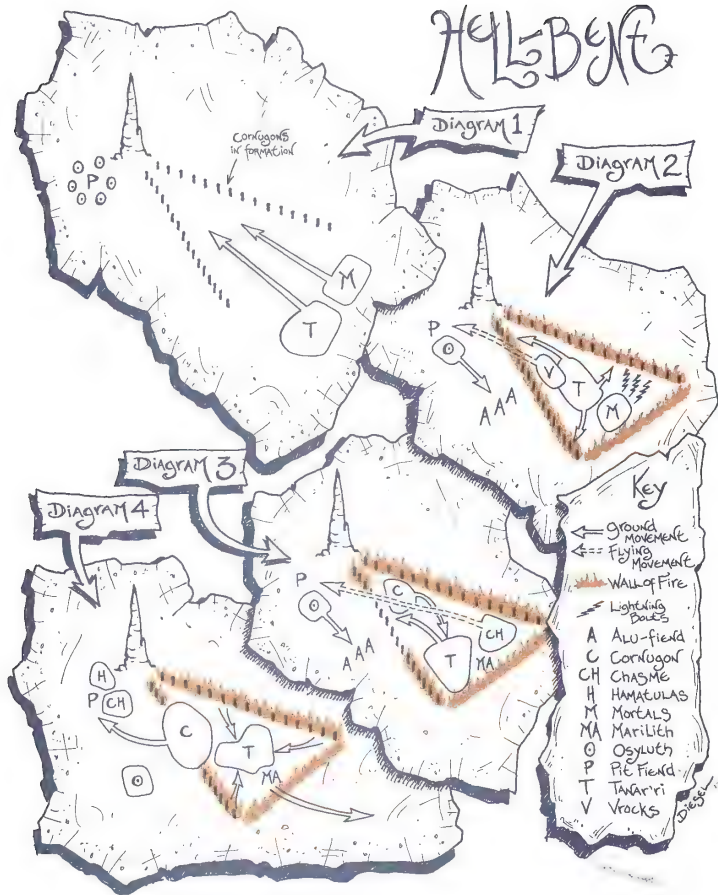
Esumkin decided to play her trump card — the chasme, who'd thus far held back. Many of the buzzing tanar'i wore *amulets of superiority* +3 that let them attack the pit fiend, and the chasme swarmed over Driin (the osyluths were too busy with the alu-fiends to interfere). This surprise tactic caught the pit fiend off guard; Driin had figured the chasme wouldn't be able to hurt him.

Fact is, Driin surely would've met his end if he hadn't *gated* in hamatula as quickly as he could to save his fiery skin (see diagram 4). The pit fiend also ordered the cornugons to pull back from finishing off the rest of the dretches and instead attack the chasme.

When Esumkin saw that her play had failed, she called for a retreat, knowing full well that only the alu-fiends and perhaps the hezrou would obey. But the osyluths'd already slain each alu-fiend. Only the marilith and two hezrou returned to the Abyss.

Together, the remaining baatezu killed the rest of the attackers. When the last tanar'i fell, only Driin, two osyluths, five hamatula, and 12 cornugons stood on the battlefield.

HEL-BENT



DEATH'S GORGE

Sometimes battles are well-planned affairs. Most of the time, though, violence breaks out just because a berk's in the wrong place at the wrong time (at least, that's the way of the Blood War). And small skirmishes have a way of swelling into large, sprawling battles thanks to the fiends' *gate* ability.

This is certainly true of the third battle of Death's Gorge. It's a tiny piece of land in Chamada, the second furnace of Gehenna. At the time, the tanar'ri held the Gorge; they'd defeated a major baatezu force a few days prior and had paid the yugoloths a hefty pile of jink to leave them alone (at least until they could recoup and bring in enough reinforcements to hold the land against further attack).

The tanar'ri stationed only a handful of guards at the Gorge: a molydeus, three babaus, and a succubus (see diagram 5). The fiends weren't the most efficient sentries, but they were available, and Death's Gorge didn't appear to be an especially strategic point at the time. The three babaus took up hidden positions, while the molydeus tried to take advantage of the succubus's charms.

Then it all fell apart. A small crew of baatezu blundered into the Gorge, chased by a large group of yugoloth mercenaries who were angry at not being paid for a recent job. Thirty-four mezzoloths, eight pisoloths, and a nycaloth were hot on the heels of one gelugon, 12 barbazu, and a herd of 28 nupperibos.

When the five tanar'ri guards saw the huge horde of fiends spill into the Gorge, they assumed it was an attack (probably thinking the baatezu and the yugoloths had joined forces). The tanar'ri immediately *gated* in a balor and five more babaus, and two hezrou came of their own accord (due to the affiliation that many true tanar'ri have with babaus). To make matters worse, the hezrou then *gated* in 80 manes (see diagram 6).

The hezrou directed the manes to swarm over the baatezu, and the babaus backed them up with their *enfeeblement* gaze from their hiding places in the sides of the Gorge. The balor *gated* in eight dretches and commanded them to call forth more help. Then it, the molydeus, and the succubus took a position at the center of the Gorge.

Naturally, the weary baatezu were surprised by the onslaught — after all, they'd run to the Gorge to get away from the yugoloths! The nupperibos spread out to block the on-rushing manes, while the 12 barbazu formed a semicircle behind the lone gelugon (to defend against the 'loths). Realizing the danger, the gelugon called forth a few reinforcements of its own — a dozen more barbazu, six osyluths, and two more gelugons.

First blood went to the Abyss. Manes claws tore into nupperibo flesh, but they couldn't overcome the fat fiends' regenerative powers. The wall of nupperibos blocked even the hezrou, until the tanar'ri slipped past with their *duo-dimension* ability. The hezrou then made for the exposed backs of the gelugons — they

were busy coping with the yugoloth attack from behind.

For the baatezu, the situation looked grim. The mezzoloths, though among the least of the yugoloths, far outmatched and outnumbered the barbazu. Even the barbazu's dreaded battle frenzy couldn't tip the balance. But then the lone nycaloth suddenly decided against risking his own neck — as well as those of the 'loths under his command — for nothing. He called the order for all yugoloths to withdraw, figuring that the tanar'ri would finish off the baatezu vermin handily (see diagram 7).

Meanwhile, the osyluths did some *gating* of their own, and summoned forth a veritable army to protect their force's back — fully 215 nupperibos. The weight of the new arrivals quickly forced the manes and hezrou back. And just in case the retreating yugoloths changed their minds, the gelugons whipped up *walls of ice* to seal them from the Gorge, then turned to face the tanar'ri.

The babaus had no fear of the nupperibos (the minor fiends literally couldn't hurt them) and waded in to hold them off while the hezrou created *walls of fire*. 'Course, that didn't bother the nupperibos or the barbazu — the fiends were immune, and marched right through. But the gelugons stopped short; flames could damage the ice-loving creatures.

Seeing the gelugons pause, the balor picked up the molydeus and flew to engage them (see diagram 8). Luckily for the gelugons, the osyluths had the presence of mind to stay with their commanders. The bony fiends didn't want to risk using magic against the highly resistant balor and molydeus. Instead, they entered into aerial combat with the encumbered balor, hoping in vain to hold it off.

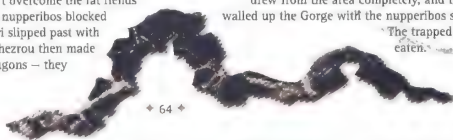
The balor dropped the molydeus into the middle of the three gelugons. Two of the icy fiends had spears of cold-wrought iron — which could harm the two-headed tanar'ri — and they went toe-to-toe with it. The other used its *fly* ability to engage the balor as it tore the osyluths apart.

On the ground, the tanar'ri had a bit less luck. Without holy weapons or water, they couldn't keep the nupperibos to stay dead once they'd killed 'em (the tanar'ri didn't have time to eat them). The manes were slaughtered. However, the nupperibos were little more than a nuisance to the babaus and hezrou, who killed the remaining barbazu. The succubus simply flew away.

With even their great power outmatched, the three gelugons eventually fell, though not before they sent the molydeus to the dead-book (which is considered by most baatezu to be a great accomplishment). The last gelugon tried to flee by *polymorphing* into a raven, but the balor hunted it down and killed it.

The yugoloths, who'd watched the whole battle, were pleased that their work was done for them — they didn't have to lift a claw to destroy the baatezu. The 'loths with drew from the area completely, and the tanar'ri walled up the Gorge with the nupperibos still inside.

The trapped sods were cañen.



DEATH'S GORGE



DIAGRAM 5



DIAGRAM 6



DIAGRAM 7



DIAGRAM 8

Key

- B BADAO
- BA BARBAZO
- BAL BALOR
- D Dretches

- G GELUGON
- H HEZROU
- M Molydeus
- MA MANES
- MZ Mezzoloths

- N NYCALOTH
- NU NUPPERIBOS
- O Osgylwths
- P PISCALOTHS
- S Succubos

THE WALLS OF CARRORISTO

Carroristo is a huge iron fortress on the Abyssal layer of the same name [the 499th, by the Guvners' reckoning]. It squats on a rocky isle in the middle of a caustic sea, protected by hezrou, washriliths, ixitxachitl, and sea trolls — hard to approach by any means. Still, Carroristo was once the site of a huge invasion of baatezu.

At the time, the fortress was manned by 356 armanites, 31 cambions, and twin mariliths who served as the commanders (though it was the known haunt of a powerful balor who assumed command when he was present). But a massive fleet of Baatorian ships, manned by yugoloth and mortal mercenaries as well as baatezu, sailed into the layer and engaged the isle's protectors, intent on reaching Carroristo at any cost.

See, the baatezu wanted to field-test a new magical item they'd invented called the *gatewall*. It blocked all magical transport within its radius, and kept any fiends (defenders or attackers) from *gating* in aid. What's more, the baatezu knew that a gate to other layers of the Abyss lay within Carroristo, and they figured that the *gatewall* would prevent any tanar'ri reinforcements.

While most of the fleet engaged the sea-borne defense, a small group (carrying the *gatewall*) landed on the island and assaulted the fortress. "Course, 'small' is a relative term. Fifty spinagons herded a thousand lemures onto the island, with air support from 45 abishai. The baatezu were joined by 30 dergholoths, 10 hydroloths, and 500 orc shock troops brought in from Acheron. A single pit fiend commanded the entire team.

When the attack began, the tanar'ri within Carroristo tried to *gate* in more fiends but couldn't — the *gatewall* worked. They couldn't even *teleport* away.

Realizing that there was no escape, a third of the armanites staged a wild charge from the gates of the fortress into the ranks of the lemures (see diagram 9). The armanites knew that the least baatezu posed no direct threat to them, and charged merely to create a diversion for the true attack. Another hundred or so fired *spark bolts* from crossbows and brought down about half of the abishai. The remaining armanites galloped into the air to swarm down upon the pit fiend commander.

As the baatezu stormed the main gates of Carroristo, the yugoloth mercenaries and orc slaves assaulted the rear of the fortress.

Virtually ignored by the castle's defenders, the 'loths and orcs raised ladders and scaled the walls.

That got the tanar'ri's attention — the twin mariliths drove the orc sds back with *ch. dkill*. The

magic had no effect on the dergholoths climbing the ladders or the hydroloths gliding over the walls (see diagram 10).

But the 'loths weren't immune to trickery. Many of the cambions slipped out of Carroristo and used their *polymorph self* ability to infiltrate the mercenaries, offering them bribes to turn stag and join the tanar'ri. This ploy confused and broke the ranks of the yugoloths; some of them accepted the offer. To further sow chaos, the mariliths *animated* a number of the slain orcs and had them turn on their fellows.

Meanwhile, at the front of the fortress, the airborne armanites continued to launch *spark bolts* at the pit fiend. The vast majority of *bolts* missed or fell to the baatezu's magic resistance, but the commander still suffered serious wounds (due to the great number of attackers). As the pit fiend lost strength, the armanites crashed into melee with their foe. They couldn't physically harm the creature further, but the sheer weight of the tanar'ri forced the pit fiend to the ground.

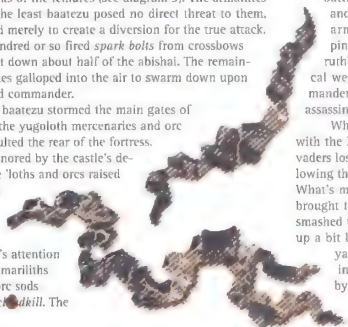
"Course, the same trick can work both ways. The mass of lemures (and their constant regeneration) soon grew too much for the initial armanite force to handle. The unrelenting waves of gloopy baatezu pushed the band of armanites back to the front gates of Carroristo, and then forced those gates open (see diagram 11).

The yugoloths still loyal to their Baatorian employers were already inside the fortress (having scaled or flown over the walls). But they fought a losing battle against the two mariliths and the remaining armanites and cambions. The orcs had long since broken and retreated (they were little more than fodder, anyway), and the dergholoths and hydroloths planned to follow suit.

However, the arrival of the unstoppable wall of lemures changed the 'loths' minds. The armanites couldn't cope with the numbers of their foe, and were forced against the inner walls of their own bastion.

Once again, though, the cambions turned the tide of the battle. They weaved cautiously through the carnage and reached the spot in front of the fortress where the armanites struggled to keep the raging pit fiend pinned to the ground (even though held fast, it was a ruthless killing machine). The cambions wielded magical weapons potent enough to draw the baatezu commander's blood, and they struck with the skill of trained assassins.

When the cambions ascended the walls of Carroristo with the head of the pit fiend on a pike, the remaining invaders lost hope. The spinagon lemure-herders flew off, following the abishai who'd already given the battle the laugh. What's more, the yugoloths threw in with the tanar'ri and brought the *gatewall* to the mariliths. The six-armed fiends smashed the device, opened the fortress's gate, and cleaned up a bit by herding the seething mass of lemures into the yawning portal. It plunged the baatezu deeper still into the Abyss, where they were all eventually eaten by hungry tanar'ri.



the walls of CARROPRIST



diagram 9

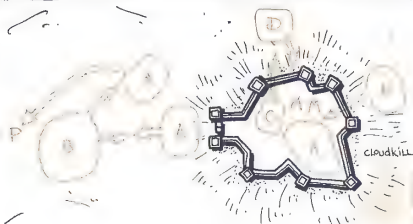


diagram 10

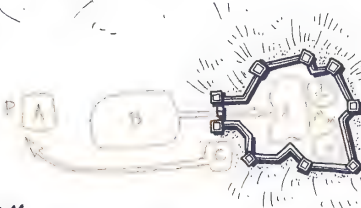


diagram 11

Key

- ground movement
- flying movement
- A Armanites
- B Baatezu
- C Cambions
- D Dergholoths
- H Hydroloths
- M Marilith
- O Orcs
- Pk Pit Fiend
- Yugoloths

Naturally, a conflict as vast and destructive as the Blood War is going to draw attention from the powers of the planes. The fighting — and its possible repercussions — just can't be ignored. If one side or another ever actually won, it'd send ripples of radical change throughout the multiverse (probably for the worse).

THE POWERS THAT BE

Course, the Blood War's a bit like the Prime Material Plane. Most gods don't dare to interfere too blatantly, or they risk the wrath of their fellow deities. But that doesn't stop some from trying. It's well known that proxies and worshipers of the less subtle powers make overtures for the baatezu, the tanar'ri, or both. Numerous gods of war even send their minions to the battlefields to fight the fiends, quell the violence, or fan the flames.

But some powers fear taking too strong a hand, all because of an ancient legend that's probably just hogwash (but why

take chances?). The tale goes like this: Somewhere along the line, one group of fiends — most likely the baatezu or the yugoloths — took a dislike to the meddling of a particularly nosy god. Over millennia, the canny monsters managed to destroy the faith of every last one of the god's worshipers. Some were tempted away with riches or power, while others died in plagues and wars (and the fiends saw to it that their devotion crumbled to ashes in their final moments of life). As the worshipers fell, so too did the interfering god fade and die; it's said his withered husk still clutters up the Astral Plane.

No power wants to risk the loss of its realm or a slow death in the silver void. That's why many try to protect their followers and be more circumspect in their Blood War dealings. The gods discussed in this chapter, though, don't bend to old stories or implied threats. They meddle

in the Blood War when they like.

WHEN THE PLANES SHAKE,
EVEN THE GODS
LE NO+ICE.

— VOX BORDELL,
A PRIEST
OF THE DOOMGUARD

◆ LAW AND CHAOS ◆

It ain't as uncommon as a body might think for gods of good and evil to work together, at least for a short while. They've just got to stop arguing over their moral differences and take a good look at their ethical similarities in the greater causes of law and chaos. And there's no greater rallying point than the Blood War, the ultimate struggle of those clashing ideals, played out daily by the baatezu and tanar'ri — the malformed soldiers of the ethical poles.

Thus, powers who hold law or chaos more dear than their moral orientation make deals through proxies and emissaries. The lawful gods often ally with the baatezu, the chaotic with the tanar'ri. Sure, it might a pain a prime on Oerth or Toril to think that his most cherished good deity would ever consort with evil gods or fiends, but on the planes things are muddier. The gods simply do what's needed ensure their own survival — and that of the multiverse.

CHAMPIONS OF LAW

First and foremost, of course, are those lawful good powers who seek only to storm the blood-soaked fields and slay the fiends. Clangeddin Silverbeard, the dwarf god of glorious battle, may be the most heralded of the lot. In his realm on Arcadia, the deity commands that his einherlar petitioners engage in a constant cycle of training at home and raiding the Lower Planes, training and raiding, training and raiding. However, Silverbeard insists that his dwarves wage a strictly ethical and valorous war. There is no honor in deceit, no glory in cowardice; the best way to deal with a fiend is to lop off its foul head, plain and simple.

A power less impassioned — but no less lawful — is Primus, the neutral patron of the modrons of Mechanus. It views the Blood War as chaos on a mammoth scale. Primus hates the tanar’ri, but it has no love of the baatezu, either. It sees them as a mockery of law — the fiends constantly look for a loophole, a way out, an interpretation that best suits their own purposes. But when the time comes to choose a side, when the tanar’ri get a little too close to stirring up trouble on Mechanus, Primus subtly sets events in motion for its unquestioning followers to take action. Usually, all the god need do is make apparent the movement of the tanar’ri (which it casts as an undesirable shift in the cosmic balance). The modrons then work to set things right, often through their Army of the Blood War (see the “Major Players” chapter for more information).

Not all lawful powers get as involved as Silverbeard and Primus, though. Hachiman, the lawful neutral god of war (of the Japanese pantheon), prefers a more subtle approach. Though his Ysgardian realm of Kenyama boasts hordes of violent and mighty petitioners, Hachiman rarely commits them to fighting. Instead, he likes to survey the landscapes of the Lower Planes and gather chant on the fiendish armies. The deity can tumble to the strength, numbers, and general readiness of the Baatorian and Abyssal forces, and can even peer into the heads of the commanders to pick up specific tactics and strategies. It amuses Hachiman to have the knowledge of the Blood War at his disposal; fact is, he enjoys predicting the tides of battle and second-guessing the decisions of the generals. But the accumulated wisdom also makes his proxies on Ysgard the bloods to see for the dark of baatezu or tanar’ri battle plans.

As for the evil side of law, two of the best (or worst) examples are found on Acheron. There, Maglubiyet of the goblins and Gruumsh of the orcs endlessly try to wipe each other’s troops from the sides of the floating cubes. If they overcame their mutual hatred, they could both throw in with the baatezu full time. But that’s not going to happen anytime soon. Each god has the bulk of his troops committed to the fight on Acheron, and neither can lend strength to Baator unless the other power decides to ease up a bit. ‘Course, when one does, the other army tries to take advantage of the lull by pressing hard. Thus, the deities must keep goblin and orc affairs in the Blood War simple and short-lived — the troops must be ready at a moment’s notice to return to Acheron and resume their principal fight.

Truth is, Maglubiyet doesn’t much care if the baatezu win the Blood War. He figures that the victors’ll eventually look to conquer Acheron’s cubes, and he’ll end up fighting them anyway. But for now, Maglubiyet wants to look good to the high-ups of Baator. If nothing else, it angers the orcs, and Maglubiyet does whatever he can to needle the followers of Gruumsh.

When Maglubiyet’s able (and willing) to help the baatezu, he does it with a subtlety that even the Dark Eight’d find exemplary. Every move, every action is worked covertly through proxies and other leaders of his goblin minions. A carefully laid network of spies feeds a steady stream of chant back to Acheron from all fronts and cultures. Nothing’s left to chance.

When Gruumsh can spare followers for the Blood War, he sends his fiercest warriors — orcs who’ve gouged out one of their eyes as tribute to their god — to crush what he considers the mewling mass of tanar’ri rabble. Gruumsh rules his orcs with a fist of steel, and he bristles at the thought of the undisciplined tanar’ri running amok in the multiverse. Not nearly as calculating as Maglubiyet, Gruumsh simply sees chaos as weakness, and weakness must be burned away.

HARBINGERS OF CHAOS

On the other side of the coin, most powers of chaos seem too disorganized to provide much useful aid to the tanar'ri — big surprise there. Some of them are so capricious that they ignore the Blood War for centuries at a time, then launch into a sudden, spastic fury of aid that nearly overwhelms both sides. 'Course, before long, the gods lose interest again.



But a body can count on a small handful of evil deities to fan the flames of the war every chance they get. Take Morrigan, the Celtic goddess of war from Tir na Og (on the Outlands). She sends her proxies to whip the fiends into a fighting frenzy no matter what the reason. Crude, ugly, and maniacal, Morrigan feels that any sod who falls in battle deserves to die — no healing allowed — and any coward who flees deserves much worse.

Ares, the savage Greek god of war, is much the same. He'll charge his minions to fight just for the sake of fighting; he and Morrigan have no doubt provoked the fiends into needless battles costing billions of lives. What's more, Ares has a palace on Arborea, near where Mount Olympus descends into the Gray Waste. The brutal deity often takes advantage of that route and dumps his quarrelsome warriors right into the thick of things.

Loki's a bit less bloodthirsty. When he's in the good graces with the rest of the Norse pantheon on Ysgard, he can be quite sociable. But when he's scorned for giving Thor fleas (again), he sulks in his wintry palace on Pandemonium, where he plots and schemes to foul up the works of the war. Loki loves to send fire and frost giants to annoy both baatezu and tanar'ri, though in a pinch he'll side with the Abyss.

The avatar of the Indian goddess Kali is often seen on hilltops throughout the Lower Planes. Kali rules over the 643rd layer of the Abyss — an ever-changing maze of tunnels called the Caverns of the Skull — but rarely sends her worshipers to fight (they like to strangle their victims with knotted cords, which isn't too effective against fiends). Instead, she revels in the bloodshed and destruction; her intricate, eerie dances mesmerize any sod who happens to note her four-armed form watching over a battle.

Apart from such obvious meddlers, the only other chaotic gods who bother with the Blood War are those of various monster races. For example, Hruggek steps in once or twice every eon to protect his bugbears on Pandemonium. When fiends from Baator or the Abyss raid the howling plane for "recruits," the bugbear god takes a stand. Such events are short-lived, as the bugbears take the fight to the baatezu, the tanar'ri, and any other sods that get in their way. Then the fiends usually decide to leave Hruggek's folk alone for a time, and the bugbears march back to Pandemonium and slam the door shut behind them.

Then there's Apomps the Three-Sided, the father of the gehreleths. Strictly speaking, Apomps is neutral evil, but its creations came out chaotic (that's one reason the other baernaloths banished Apomps from their ranks). Unlike most other gods, Apomps's stake in the war is personal. It hates anything

related to its former fellows. That includes the yugoloths — creations of the other baernaloths — who're the ones running the Blood War.

Thus, gehreleths attack yugoloths on sight, but they otherwise stay out of the fighting. Instead, they journey to other planes, where they peel humanoid poets and philosophers into preaching hatred for the yugoloths. It's a small vengeance, but Apomps knows that the one thing the yugoloths fear most is the light of truth.

◆ GOOD AND EVIL ◆

Just as naturally as law struggles against chaos, so does good wrestle with evil. Fact is, the latter clash is the one that gets the most attention from the rest of the multiverse. Most pantheons feature benevolent gods striving against the dark tides of murder and deception, and their mythologies focus on the eternal, simplistic struggle between the two forces.

It ain't as simple as all that. When it comes to the war, some powers of good — like Ishtar — think it necessary to keep the fiends at each other's throats. If the baatezu and tanar'ri ever settled their differences, they say, the fiends'd unite and ravage the Upper Planes. For that same reason, evil bloods — like the Abyssal lord Graz'zt — work toward ending the war. It might seem backward or even barny, but that's what the war does to folks — even gods.

HERALDS OF GOOD

Kiri-Jolith, the Krynnish god of righteous warfare, is often one of the first deities who comes to mind when counting off good powers who dabble in the Blood War. Much like Clangeddin Silverbeard, Kiri-Jolith holds dear the principles of honor, courage, justice, and glory — meat and drink to the legions of paladins that praise his name.

But he's a bit more concerned with righting wrongs than merely squashing evil. Kiri-Jolith dwells on Bytopia, far from the contested lands of the war, and it pains his heart to think of the millions of innocents stuck in the firing line. Many are taken hostage, pressed into service, or killed in the crossfire. That kind of warfare has no honor or value, no sense of fair play, and gleaming paladins of the Upper Planes steadfastly ride forth to rescue victims of fiendish tyranny.

Many powers of good aren't as lawful as Kiri-Jolith. Fact is, the chaotic warrior gods of the Norse pantheon — Odin, Sif, and Thor — often stick their noses into the Blood War, and for far less worthy reasons: boredom, for example, or sport. Troops of einheriar and valkyries march out under the proud eye of Odin; it's always a tempestuous, playful affair, full of boisterous singing and roughhousing. The deities see this as an opportunity to shake things up a bit on the Lower Planes, while providing their followers with a little diversion from the routine battles on Ysgard.

The armies usually hit a field just as the action's getting hot and heavy, and they head for the thickest part of the



fight. While they generally favor the side of the tanar'ri — kinship through chaos — the feeling's not mutual. Fact is, the Abyssal fiends hate the einheriar, so it doesn't take much for them to turn on the Ysgardians. Then the fight becomes really exciting. After a decade or two, the invaders grow weary of being so far from home, and, bearing their dead, turn and quit the field.

The Norse aren't the only gods from Ysgard who have at the fiends. Followers of Anhur, the Egyptian god of war, journey to the closer Lower Planes — the Abyss and the Gray Waste — to lay low the hordes of evil. But while Anhur's chaotic, he's not hot-headed. His great wisdom makes him slow to burn.

'Course, when he's duly provoked, his fury swells even greater. In his realm of Netaph, Anhur hoards many ancient forms of magic lost to the sages of the planes, and his minions often wield weapons and spells the like of which the fiends've never seen. An army from Netaph is almost always preceded by flocks of eagles, falcons, and other birds of prey thick enough to darken the sky for miles in every direction.

Kuan-ti of Elysium is another cool-headed god of war — and diplomacy. This scholarly, neutral deity of the Chinese pantheon wants to bring the Blood War to an end, not by stamping out the baatezu or the tanar'ri, but by mending fences. Kuan-ti's proxies regularly mediate disputes between Baatorian and Abyssal commanders, trying valiantly to settle the fiends' differences with as little blood spilled as possible. They usually fail, and even when they pull it off, the victory's not much to crow about — perhaps one side agreed to give up a single hostage from the thousands it holds. Still, Kuan-ti knows that the first steps toward peace must be small ones.

WRE+CHES OF EVIL

Naturally, all the powers of goodness have their opposite numbers in the Lower Planes, who are more or less determined to see the rise of evil.

One of the most well-known is Set, the Egyptian god of wickedness and murder. Because Set is lawful and hangs his hat in Baator (in Ankhwugaht, his desert realm on the fifth layer), a body'd think that he'd devote his shapeshifting minions and shadow priests to the victory of the baatezu. Well, it's true — to a point. The Lord of Evil doesn't really care about the fortunes of the baatezu, but he figures that if the lawful fiends gain the upper hand, Baator might extend its influence and swallow up the rest of the Lower Planes. Set's realm'd surely grow in the deal (and with the baatezu

off storming the Upper Planes, he could seize control of more of Baator).

Another schemer in the game is Sung Chiang, the Chinese god of thieves, who manifests himself in the Teardrop Palace on Gehenna. Cambions may be the stealthiest assassins in the war, but Sung Chiang's followers make

some of the best peblers, pickpockets, and cross-traders anywhere. Whereas Set is lawful evil, Chiang tends toward neutral evil, and he's glad to play baatezu and tanar'ri off each other in order to grow his own coffers. He finds the task so easy as to be almost dreary, and always searches for new scams and deals — anything to provide him with more of a challenge.

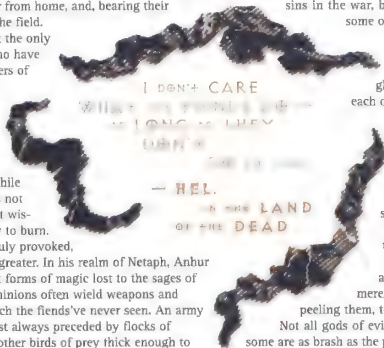
Proxies of Chiang're often seen consorting with greater yugoloths, the self-styled masters of trickery and deception. But it's not known if the deity's reached an agreement with the 'loths, or if he's merely making dretches out of them by peeling them, too.

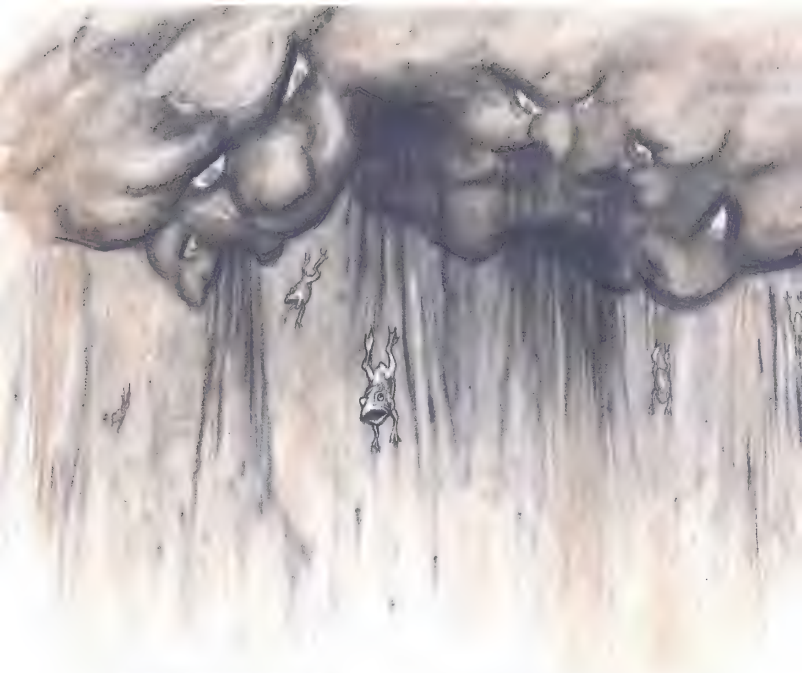
Not all gods of evil take the subtle approach. Fact is, some are as brash as the paladins of Kiri-Jolith, in their own special way. Morgion (of Krynn) and Yurtus (of the orcs) are both powers of disease and decay who inhabit, naturally enough, the Gray Waste. But that's not to say they work together. Morgion's a hateful recluse who enjoys floating over a battlefield as a rolling black cloud and raining down pestilence (rats, locusts, fire toads, and the like) until nothing's left alive. Yurtus sends his white-gloved priests to spread all sorts of blistering, leprous outbreaks of disease.

Finally, there's a group of powerful evil beings, one step removed from true godhood, who nonetheless try to meddle in the push and pull of the Blood War — the Abyssal lords. A body'd swear that these chaotic rulers would naturally do all they could to promote the tanar'ri, but that isn't the case. Sure, some do — Kostchtchie (lord of the 23rd layer) trains murderous frost giants in the art of wizardry and turns them loose on the baatezu, and Lissa'aere the Noxious (lord of the 27th) has stopped more than one Baatorian invasion force as it crossed from Carceri into the Abyss.

But no one less than Graz'zt himself, lord of the triple layer of Azzagrat, seeks to put an end to the fighting. Graz'zt simply doesn't see the use in eternal war with the baatezu — not when both races could unite and crush the celestials. Fact is, Graz'zt works through Rule-of-Three (Pl/♂ tanar'ri [marquis cambion]/HD 6/CE), a cryptic resident of Sigil, to arrange peace talks between baatezu and tanar'ri high-ups. Should the ambitious lord ever realize his goal, the rest of the multiverse'd better say its prayers.

NOTE: Rule-of-Three is featured in the PLANESCAPE™ NPC book *Uncaged: Faces of Sigil*.





Of the handful of powers who truly care nothing for law or chaos, good or evil, even fewer find it necessary to drag themselves or their followers into the Blood War. After all, truly neutral gods don't care which side wins the war, or who the victors might choose as their next target — unless, of course, their own realms are at risk.

Fact is, a number of neutral deities reside smack in the middle of the fighting. The Gray Waste, especially, has become a lodestone of sorts for death gods of every pantheon. Arawn of the Celts and Hel of the Norse occupy the first and second layers of the plane, respectively, and Blood War battles often spill over into their backyards.

Hades, on the other hand, sees little of the ravaging hordes — at least, the fiendish kind. His Underworld lies deep in Pluton, the third layer of the Waste, right near the

descending slopes of Mount Olympus. Thus, the Greek Lord of the Dead occasionally suffers the Arboreal warriors of Ares who use his realm as a shortcut to battle.

This trio of death gods — among many other powers who remain neutral — could easily squash the interlopers like bugs, and they often do. Deities of neutrality simply want to keep the Blood War at arm's length, and protect their followers from its fires. They care only so far as the war affects them or theirs, and most have the might to make sure that it never does.

Beyond that, a few take roles as observers or recorders, noting the ebb and flow of the clashes, but never interfering one way or the other. Gilean of Krynn fits that bill, as he tends to his task of chronicling the life of the multiverse. But he allows the Blood War as much (or as little) personal interest as he gives to any other matter of history — nothing beyond a mild curiosity.

Not everyone plays a major part in the Blood War. It's not just a question of desire; some folks who want desperately to get involved never see a bit of bloodshed. It's often just a matter of being in the right place at the right time, and knowing how to pull strings or call in favors.

Fact is, most mortal sods in the war do little more than fill the smallest roles. They're just tiny threads in a tapestry so large it renders them practically unnoticeable. Worse, most are totally expendable and replaceable; another mortal berk's always ready to fill a deader's shoes. Only a rare few manage to raise themselves high enough to make the war respond in even the slightest way to their desires.

Thus, most folks settle for the bit parts. Some accept the insignificance of their roles, content to be like a flea on the slopes of Mount Celestia. Others insist that even the smallest contribution can have a drastic impact on events — that a flea might knock a pebble that hits a rock that starts an

avalanche. But it all depends on picking the battles that matter.

This chapter contains suggestions for player characters and NPCs who want to get involved with the Blood War, but don't really know where to start.

◆ COURIERS ◆

Every berk knows that, in wartime, the right chant at the right time can mean the difference between winning and losing a battle. And that goes beyond just the two sides who're doing the fighting. In the Blood War, spies are everywhere, digging up the dark for the baatezu, the tanar'ri, the yugoloths, and anyone who wants to influence or profit from the carnage. They all need to get information back to their superiors in a hurry, without exposing themselves or leaving their place of observation. Couriers become an invaluable commodity.

The PCs can hire on as couriers for an army that's knee-deep in the fighting, shuttling chant on troop strengths, locations, and whatnot back and forth between the front lines and the commanders' positions. But what mortal's fool enough to brave the battlefields just to help one dastardly bunch of fiends whittle away at another? The PCs could take a far more subtle tack, and work for a less involved force that sits in the wings, watching and waiting.

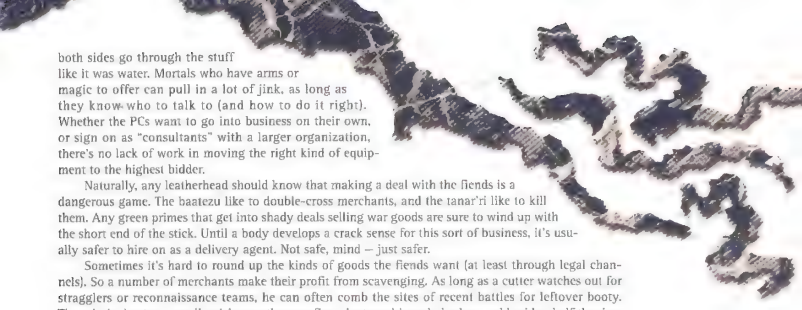
Course, a body'd better make certain he has a few means of escape, just in case he's found out. Nothing rubs a fiendish commander the wrong way like finding a berk selling secret or sensitive chant to other parties. The best a captured sod could hope for is that the commander'd kill him outright — that way, he'd avoid the kind of skin-screaming punishment reserved for such treachery.

◆ ARMS DEALERS ◆

Spend a fair amount of time on the Lower Planes, and a sharp cutter's going to realize that weapons and magic are in short supply and high demand —

BIT PARTS

— GEARHEAD SIM
A +IEFLING SC@U+
FOR +HE BAA+EZU



both sides go through the stuff like it was water. Mortals who have arms or magic to offer can pull in a lot of junk, as long as they know who to talk to (and how to do it right). Whether the PCs want to go into business on their own, or sign on as "consultants" with a larger organization, there's no lack of work in moving the right kind of equipment to the highest bidder.

Naturally, any leatherhead should know that making a deal with the fiends is a dangerous game. The batezu like to double-cross merchants, and the tanar'ri like to kill them. Any green primes that get into shady deals selling war goods are sure to wind up with the short end of the stick. Until a body develops a crack sense for this sort of business, it's usually safer to hire on as a delivery agent. Not safe, mind — just safer.

Sometimes it's hard to round up the kinds of goods the fiends want (at least through legal channels). So a number of merchants make their profit from scavenging. As long as a cutter watches out for stragglers or reconnaissance teams, he can often comb the sites of recent battles for leftover booty. Though the batezu usually pick over the area first, the tanar'ri rarely bother, and besides, half the time the fiends vacate the field so quickly that there's no time to clean up all the scattered equipment. An industrious scavenger can collect enough to make it worth an established arms dealer's while. 'Course, if a greedy sod runs off with a fiend's favorite magical axe in the process, there's no telling who might come calling somewhere down the road.

◆ MERCENARIES ◆

Some mortals just aren't content to skirt the sidelines of a fight by selling chant or making deals. They see one fiend bashing another, and they want to jump in, sword swinging. Well, the Blood War's always got room for one more in the thick of things (fact is, it's usually got room for a *thousand* more). But a body'd better be ready for a serious brawl; the fiends've gone at it for quite a long time, and they've gotten brutally good at their work.

Usually, one or two fights against a slaving tanar'ri — close enough to wince from the monster's fetid breath — changes a berk's mind right quick. But there's no need to go toe-to-toe with the enemy. Mages are just as important a resource on the field of battle, and they can keep a good distance. A spellslinger'd better study up on the opponent, though, because not everything's going to work like it should. The number of stunned Clueless who found themselves on the wrong end of a claw when their spell fizzled is beyond counting.

Finally, bashers who aren't cut out for the mass slaughter of a battlefield might consider hiring themselves out as bodyguards for some high-up or other. The commanders of the fiend armies are usually plenty well protected without needing any mortals' help, but a few like to keep the sods around anyway — they feel it adds to their perceived importance. 'Course, most leaders won't trust anyone but their own carefully hand-picked honor guard, anyway.

But bodyguards can find work elsewhere. Plenty of wealthy bloods in Sigil — merchant lords, diplomats, and so on — need to make trips to (or through) Blood War battlefields, and they don't want to go alone. A cutter'd better not hit the road at the first sign of trouble, though, because no one'll hire a guard who's known to leave his charge in the dust when the going gets rough.

◆ RECRUITERS AND RESCUERS ◆

Probably one of the most feared sights throughout the Lower Planes — other than a million-strong pack of fiends out for blood — is a press gang. These roving squads of mortals and fiends (usually osylths or babaus, depending on the home plane) prowl the lands for one purpose only: to secure new troops for the army. Occasionally they convince a sod to sign up by promising him a load of junk (which may or may not be delivered). More often, though, they just grab anyone who looks tough or canny enough to make a good soldier. If the "volunteer" puts up too much resistance, he's slain on the spot — both sides'd rather kill a potential draftee than risk having him fight for the other side.

Both the baatezu and the tanar'ri employ press gangs, and they can always use more recruiters to help drum up support for the war effort. Most mortals who join a gang see it this way: Either they find other berks to fight in the trenches, or they'll get sent to the front lines themselves. Truth is, more than a few mortals who belong to press gangs get carried away with their work, and grow more rabid than the fiends in scouting out fresh meat — all in the name of self-preservation.

On the other side of the coin, brave mortals can make a decent living rescuing folks who've been pressed into a Baatorian or Abyssal army. Naturally, most victims come from poor, powerless families who can offer little but friendship and gratitude in exchange for the safe return of their loved ones. But now and then a wealthy or landed family of Sigil loses a relative to a press gang, and will pay any amount to have him rescued.

◆ DOUBLE AGENTS ◆

Bashers who truly don't care whether they live or die can earn their soup by selling the dark of battle plans from *both* sides to the other, and then sweetening the take by offering the same chant to any interested third parties. The job really boils down to crossing anyone and everyone that's crossable at all. The yugoloths are masters of this type of double dealing.

Course, an average mortal is a far cry from a yugoloth, but it's possible that a canny 'loth might take a promising candidate under its wing, and train the berk in the methods of deceit (and survival). Remember, though, the baatezu and tanar'ri are no slouches themselves when it comes to cross-trading. They've seen every imaginable variation on the theme, and they have lots of ways to track down leaks — and plug them permanently. A double agent'd better watch his back at all times, or else be ready to spend the rest of his life in Sigil after one or two daring escapades. Fiends have long memories.

◆ SPIES ◆

Good spies keep their eyes and ears out for anything suspicious, whether they manage to sidle up to a pit fiend's tent on a battlefield or Carceri, or just overhear some interesting chant between two cambions at a Sigil street cafe. Knowledge is power — that's why the Fraternity of Order's so bent on learning the laws of the multiverse. And the spy that picks up the power's share of the chant is the one that'll walk away with the most jink in his pocket.

Spies can work for just about anyone —

the baatezu, the tanar'ri, the yugoloths, one of the quarreling factions, a merchant or arms dealer, or maybe even the proxy of a god. Given the possibility that a spy might turn stag and become a double or triple agent, most would-be employers insist on extensive background checks, references, and interrogations before they hire a berk for a job. Even then, they usually pull something out of their sleeve to ensure the loyalty of their new spy — say, a magical bracelet with which they can track his movements.

A good number of roguish mortals seek out the life of a Blood War spy. They feel it's exciting, glamorous, the ultimate test of their finely honed skills. But with so many spies running around, a sod's got his work cut out for him just figuring out who he can trust and who he should shut up his bone-box tight near. Chant tells of an arcanaloth in Sigil — some say it was Shemeskha the Marauder (PI/9 arcanaloth/HD 12+24/NE) — who hired dozens of mortal spies and set them all to watching one another, just to confuse her enemies and keep the mortal fools out of her way.

NOTE: Shemeskha the Marauder is featured in the PLANESCAPE™ NPC book *Uncaged: Faces of Sigil*.

◆ PAWNS ◆

Naturally, the role of "pawn" ain't one that mortals take on willingly — they usually consider themselves of much more importance than that. But no berk's ever going to know the full dark of the Blood War; that's just a fact of life. The difference between a canny blood and a leatherhead is that the leatherhead never figures that out. As a result, the fool gets taken for a ride, unwittingly serving the needs of one side when he actually might share the beliefs of the other. It happens to every mortal at least once or twice in his planar career, and nothing can be done about it.

This type of snookering really drives home the staggering enormity of the war. Most mortals can never truly make much of an impact, no matter how hard they try. And when a body starts digging, he uncovers more and more layers, until he's faced with a conspiracy so huge and complex that all he can do is run away.

Failing that, a dupe's only other option is to clean up the mess afterward and stay out of the dead-book while doing it. And to prevent getting peeled in the future (or, at least, make it less likely), it's best to learn as much as possible about who's who in the game, and which folks stand to gain or lose when the deed's done.

Cutters who toil regularly for the cause of good seem to develop a sixth sense about the Blood War, a tingle that tells them when something just doesn't feel right. They can smell an ulterior motive at work, or know when a berk's keeping back part of the truth. It's what separates them from the rest of the marks that get taken advantage of every single day in Sigil.

APPENDIX

◆ FIEND ATTACKS ◆

The three tables in this section show which level of enchanted targets can be struck by each type of baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloth. The listings apply only to fiends making natural attacks with claws, fangs, tail, or whatever (no magical assistance). The results were determined by using the Code of Enchantment (see page 39 for more information) in conjunction with the attackers' Hit Dice (see "Hit Dice Vs. Immunity," Table 48 in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*).

For example, a gelugon's natural attack can hit targets normally struck only by +4 weapons (Table 1). As the table shows, this includes all lesser weapons (so the gelugon can also hit targets struck by +3, +2, +1, and nonmagical weapons). An entry of "—" means that the attacker can hit only targets vulnerable to ordinary (nonmagical) weapons.

NOTE: All tables in the Appendix clear up errors found in previous fiend sources.

TABLE I: THE BAA+EZU

ATTACKER	CAN HIT	ATTACKER	CAN HIT
Abishai, black	+1 or less	Hamatula	+2 or less
Abishai, green	+1 or less	Kocrachon	+2 or less
Abishai, red	+2 or less	Lemure	—
Amnizu	+3 or less	Nupperibo	—
Barbazu	+2 or less	Osluth	+1 or less
Cornugon	+3 or less	Pit fiend	+4 or less
Erinyes	+2 or less	Spinagon	—
Gelugon	+4 or less		

TABLE II: THE TANAR'RI

ATTACKER	CAN HIT	ATTACKER	CAN HIT
Alkilith	+4 or less	Hezrou	+3 or less
Alu-fiend	+1 or less	Manes	—
Armanite	+2 or less	Marilith	+4 or less
Babau	+3 or less	Maurezhi	+1 or less
Balor	+4 or less	Molydeus	+4 or less
Bar-Igura	+2 or less	Nabassu	+2 or less
Bulezau	+2 or less	Nalfeshnee	+4 or less
Cambion, major	—	Rutterkin	—
Cambion, baron	+1 or less	Succubus	+2 or less
Chasme	+2 or less	Vrock	+2 or less
Dretch	—	Wastrilith	+4 or less
Glabrezu	+3 or less	Yochlol	+2 or less
Goristro	+4 or less		

TABLE III: THE YUGOLOTH'S

ATTACKER	CAN HIT	ATTACKER	CAN HIT
Arcanaloth	+4 or less	Hydroloth	+2 or less
Baernaloth	+4 or less	Marraenoloth	+4 or less
Canoloth	+2 or less	Mezzoloth	+4 or less
Dergholoth	+3 or less	Nycaloth	+4 or less
Guardian, least	+1 or less	Piscoloth	+3 or less
Guardian, lesser	+2 or less	Ultraloth	+4 or less
Guardian, greater	+3 or less	Yagnioloth	+4 or less

◆ STANDARD FIEND VULNERABILITIES ◆

The table below shows vulnerabilities that all known baatezu (the first group), tanar'i (the second group), and yugoloths (the third group) have to standard forms of attack. An entry of "—" means that the fiend takes no damage from that attack. If an entry says "special," or if a fiend has an asterisk (*) after its name, turn to page 80 for more information.

Abishai*	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Amnizu*	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Barbazu	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Cornugon	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Erinyes	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Gelugon	full	full	—	—	full	full	half	half
Hamatula	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Kocrachon	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Lemure*	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Nupperibo*	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Osyloth	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Pit fiend	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Spinaggon	full	full	half	half	full	full	—	—
Alkilith*	—	—	half	half	—	—	half	—
Alu-fiend	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Armanite*	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Babau*	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Balor	full	—	half	—	—	—	half	—
Barlgura	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Bulezau	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Cambion	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Chasme	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Dretch	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Glabrezu	full	—	half	—	—	—	half	—
Goristro*	full	full	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hezrou	full	half	half	half	—	—	half	—
Manes	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Mariloth*	full	half	half	half	—	—	half	—
Maurezhi	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Molydeus*	full	—	half	—	—	—	half	—
Nabassu	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Nalfeshnee	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Rutterkin	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Succubus	full	full	half	half	—	—	—	—
Vrock	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Wastriith*	full	full	—	—	special	special	special	special
Yochlol*	full	full	half	half	—	—	half	—
Arcanaloath*	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Baernaloth	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Canoloth*	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Dergholoth	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Guardian*	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Hydroloth*	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Marraenoloth*	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Mezzoloth*	—	—	full	full	full	full	—	—
Nycaloth*	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Piscoloth*	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—
Ultraloth	—	—	double	—	full	—	—	—
Yagnoloth*	—	—	double	double	full	full	—	—

half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	half	+2
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	half	+2
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	half	+2
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	ordinary
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	ordinary
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	half	+3
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	ordinary
---	---	full	---	---	full	half	+2
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	+2
half	half	full	---	---	full	half	+1
half	---	full	---	---	full	half	+3
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	ordinary
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	ordinary
half	half	full	---	---	full	half	ordinary
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	ordinary
half	---	full	---	---	full	half	+2
---	---	full	---	---	full	half	special
half	half	full	---	---	full	half	+2
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	ordinary
half	half	full	---	---	full	half	+2
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	+1
half	---	full	---	---	full	---	---
half	half	full	---	---	full	half	+1
half	half	full	---	---	full	half	+2
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	ordinary
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	+2
half	half	full	---	---	full	full	+2
half	half	full	---	---	full	half	+2
half	half	full	---	---	full	half	+2
---	---	full	---	---	full	full	+2
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+3
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+3
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	special
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+2
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+2
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+1
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+3
half	---	full	---	---	---	full	+3
half	half	full	---	---	---	full	+

The table below shows vulnerabilities (or invulnerabilities) that various baatezu (the first group), tanar'ri (the second group), and yugoloths (the third group) have to special forms of attack. Baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths without any special vulnerabilities are not listed.

Abishai	Suffers 2d4 points of damage from holy water.
Amnizu	A <i>holy word</i> drives it back to Stygia, its home layer on Baator.
Lemure	Immune to all mind-affecting spells.
Nupperibo	Immune to all mind-affecting spells.
Alkiliith	Suffers half damage from Type S and B weapons; immune to physical damage while in gaseous form.
Armanite	Suffers 3d6 points of damage from holy water (1d6 from splashes).
Babau	Suffers half damage from Type S and P weapons.
Goristro	Hit only by +1 weapons (if 140-200 hp), +2 weapons (if 201-240 hp), or +3 weapons (if 241-280 hp).
Mariilith	Not fooled by illusions; immune to all mind-affecting spells.
Molydeus	Vulnerable only to spells, magical effects, and cold iron weapons (immune to silver and magical weapons).
Wastrilith	Immune to water-based attacks. Suffers double damage from magical, and normal fire attacks when out of water, no damage when fully immersed in water. Half of all electrical attacks made on wastrilith rebound and affect caster instead.
Yochlol	While in gaseous form, vulnerable only to magical cold, magical fire, <i>magic missiles</i> , a <i>gust of wind</i> spell (which causes 6d6 points of damage), and a <i>wind walk</i> spell (which kills it instantly).
Arcanaloth	Immune to mind-affecting spells.
Canoloth	Unaffected by spells that rely on visual effects.
Guardian	Immune to <i>charm</i> , <i>hold</i> , <i>sleep</i> , <i>polymorph</i> , and <i>fear</i> spells. Least guardians are 50% likely to be immune to one additional attack form; lesser guardians are 80% likely to be immune to one additional attack form; greater guardians are always immune to two additional attack forms. Least guardians can be struck by ordinary (nonmagical) weapons; lesser/greater guardians can be struck only by +2 or greater weapons.
Hydroloth	Suffers half damage from water-based attacks (no damage if save is successful).
Marraenoloth	Has 80% magic resistance to 1st-level spells; magic resistance decreases by 5% for each higher level of spells.
Mezzoloth	Immune to paralysis, <i>charm</i> spells, and <i>suggestion</i> spells.
Nycaloth	Immune to all enchantment/charm spells.
Piscoloth	All water-based attacks inflict -1 point of damage per die.
Yagnoloth	Suffers half damage from earth-based attacks.



Here's where to find complete statistics and reference information for all known baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths:

PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendix II (TSR product #2613): Tanar'ri: alkiliith, bulezau, maurezhi, yochlol. Yugoloth: canoloth.

PLANESCAPE Campaign Setting Monstrous Supplement (2600): Yugoloth: marraenoloth.

Planes of Chaos Monstrous Supplement (2603): Tanar'ri: armanite, goristro.

Planes of Law Monstrous Supplement (2607): Baatezu: kocachon.

Planes of Conflict Monstrous Supplement (2615): Yugoloth: baernaloth.

MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome (2140): Yugoloth: guardian yugoloths.

All other known baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths are found in the PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix (2602).

Between these covers lurk the vile truths of the Blood War. Read a history that stretches back to the birth of the planes. Tumble to the secret magic of fiendish spellcasters. And learn who *really* pulls the strings of the war!

HERE'S +HE CHAN+:

This book is for the
Dungeon Master only.



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PLANE

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HELLBOUND:

THE BLOOD WAR



WAR
GAMES

◆ An Adventure Book ◆

FORTRESS OF INDIFFERENCE



WAR GAMES

♦ AN ADVENTURE BOOK ♦

CONTENTS

Including an Overview of the scenarios in this Volume, a note on their similar Formats, the ways of Statistics listed for friends and foes, and a look at other Sources of reference.

In which our Heroes meet a celestial who deals in Misery, journey to a grisly Battlefield where the very plants themselves drain Life, and hunt for a fiendish General's plans for the Blood War.

In which our Heroes seek errant cargo of a most delicate Nature, are caught like Flies in the web of scheming Fiends, and learn that even the forces of Good may occasionally walk in Shadow.

In which our Heroes infiltrate a Fortress that squats in the Abyss and another that lumbers across Baator to deal the Fiends a blow unparalleled — by stripping away their Power to travel the planes at will.

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War Games contains three separate adventures that plunge player characters (PCs) headlong into the most dangerous feud on the Outer Planes — the Blood War.

In "The Field of Nettles," they're hired to cross a deadly lower-planar battleground to steal the secret plans for the next phase of the fighting.

INTRODUCTION

"Strange Bedfellows" puts the heroes on the trail of a shipment of weapons that's gone missing, and makes them realize that the baatezu and tanar'ri aren't the *only* races with a vested interest in the tide of the war. Finally, the epic "Squaring the Circle" gives the PCs a chance to leave their mark on the entire PLANESCAPE™ setting — they're sent on a quest to permanently strip the fiends of their

formidable power to teleport across the planes at will. (The events of

"Squaring the Circle" might

also create a new planar

monster, the darklore, described on

pages 95–96.)

The Dungeon Master (DM) can use the three scenarios at any time, and in any order. It's also possible, but not necessary, to link the adventures into one grand campaign. If desired, "The Field of Nettles" can lead directly into the start of "Strange Bedfellows." And it makes sense to throw the PCs up against the fiends a few times before running "Squaring the Circle," in order to dramatize the monsters' reliance on teleportation — and to get the heroes aching to settle a few scores.

All of the maps and illustrations in *War Games* are for the DM's eyes only. The full-color, digest-sized *Visions of War* booklet contains maps and art for the players. But the DM shouldn't let the players flip through the digest ahead of time. Instead, at certain points during the adventures, the DM's told to show the players an illustration or map from

Visions of War (to show them a foul sight their characters stumble across, or give them a document their characters obtain during play).

It's important to note that the adventures in *War Games* hurl the heroes into a number of horrible situations and pit them against particularly heinous foes. Player characters of good alignments should be sorely troubled by what they encounter, and should do whatever is within their power to set things right. After all, the PCs are meddling in a war waged by two of the most evil races in the multiverse. If the DM successfully brings the war's horrors to life, the characters shouldn't need prodding to remember that they are, indeed, *heroes*.

♦ ADVENTURE FORMAT ♦

Each scenario in *War Games* opens with a short tale to set the mood, then launches right into the dark of things with the "Background" section, which tells a DM everything he needs to know. The section also includes the likely flow of events for the adventure (though players are by no means required to follow that course), and provides tips on how a PC's faction beliefs might color his opinions.

THE BLOOD WAR'S
CORE ADVENTURES
— TEN LIFE+TIMES.
HE +RICK IS
SURVIVING ONE.
— RAGGERBLADE
+ TIEFLING MERCENARY

In the "meat" of the adventure, text meant to be read aloud to the players is *italicized* and printed in *amber*. Many scenes also include notes labeled *THE REAL CHANCE* (which provide important secrets or information for the DM) and *SLIPPING THE BOUNDS* (which give advice on how to handle problems that might arise).

Toward the end of each scenario, "Wrapping Up" explains how the heroes can tie up the adventure's loose ends, and "Aftermath" lets the DM know what's likely to result from their actions. In many cases, the PCs can sow the seeds for future adventures by what they do – or don't do.

Finally, the "Story Awards" section gives the PCs bonus experience points (XP) for completing certain story goals. A PLANESCAPE campaign should be more about ideas and role-playing than just slaying monsters and grabbing treasure. The heroes can earn additional XP by going beyond a hack-and-slash style of play: the DM should feel free to add more story awards to those already listed for exceptional role-playing.

◆ GAME S+T+A+R+I+S+T+I+C S ◆

Statistics for the monsters and nonplayer characters in *War Games* follow the standard AD&D® game format, but the DM should be aware of a few exceptions and special notes.

First of all, not every creature in the adventures has been assigned an experience point value. As mentioned above, PLANESCAPE campaigns try to focus more on role-playing than on racking up kills. The very act of giving a creature an XP value implies that the PCs will benefit from slaying it, and some berks in *War Games* just aren't meant to be fought. 'Course, some parties'll cut them down anyway, but the leatherheads shouldn't gain XP for such hostile and unnecessary deeds.

Second, the strength of magical weapons and armor on the planes depends on where the items were forged. An object loses one plus of enchantment for each plane removed from its plane of creation, though it never goes below 0. A *short sword* +2 forged in Sigil functions at full strength in the Cage (or on the Outlands), but it loses a plus if taken to the Abyss, becoming a *short sword* +1. This book notes the source of all magical weapons and armor used by creatures and NPCs.

Third, most of the fiends in *War Games* have a number of spell-like powers, which are listed with their statistics. Unless the text states otherwise, the DM should assume that a fiend can use its innate abilities one at a time, once per round, at will.

Finally, there just ain't room in this book to list the various immunities of every fiend that rears its ugly head. The DM should consult the Appendix of *The Dark of the War: A DM's Guide*, which provides a two-page table of the standard immunities of every known type of baatezu, tamar'i, and yugoloth.

◆ ◆+HER S+O+U+R+C+E S ◆

Before running any of the adventures in *War Games*, the DM should read through the other books in the boxed set, especially *The Dark of the War: A DM's Guide* and *The Chant of the War: A Player's Guide*. The PLANESCAPE Campaign Setting boxed set is also required, and it's a good idea to have the PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendix on hand as well – the book contains full statistics for most baatezu, tamar'i, and yugoloths, and the adventures in *War Games* are brimming with fiends.

The PLANESCAPE products below aren't necessary, but they can provide a DM with plenty of helpful chant on the planes, towns, and creatures featured in *War Games*:

- ◆ The *Planes of Law* boxed set: Baator.
- ◆ The *Planes of Chaos* boxed set: the Abyss.
- ◆ The *Planes of Conflict* boxed set: Gehenna and the Gray Waste.
- ◆ *In the Cage: A Guide to Sigil*: the wards of the City of Doors.
- ◆ *A Player's Primer to the Outlands*: the gate-towns of Torch and Hopeless.
- ◆ The PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix II and the *Monstrous Supplement* booklets in the boxed sets: a variety of creatures – fiendish and otherwise – featured in the adventures.



THE FIELD OF NETTLES

The usual shock of landing knocked me from my stupor — riding in a craft is nothing like flying by wing. My senses came to full readiness as we prepared ourselves for what promised to be the deciding battle in the most recent series of sorties in the war. We checked our weapons, our fangs, and our claws. The commander called out our positions, her harsh voice braying across our sensitive ears like glass across exposed nerves; I think half the spivs in our group were in love with her for that voice alone.

The great rusted doors of our craft creaked open, and all 10,000 of us spilled forth onto the Waste. Our frantic screams of bloodlust disappeared into the circling cacophony that swirled and churned through the Field of Nettles.

With eyes
burning and
spikes
bristling, we fell
on the nearest
tanar'ri we could find.

Our orderly ranks ground them beneath our feet before they could so much as turn. The baatezu here had been fighting defensively, but with the addition of our warriors, the army grew strong.

Hordes of our hated foes boiled over the pitted hills behind us, charging our craft. It barely shimmered from their sight in time. Denied, they turned their furious attentions to us.

Acid flew. Magic flared. Bodies fell.

When the clamoring corpses finally settled at our feet, their green entrails turning gray even before our eyes, fewer than a tenth of us still stood. Our commander had fallen as well, though whether to the blade of enemy or friend, none could say. Command devolved to me. All eyes sought mine, eager for the message that we would return to the slime pits and maggot-eaten charnel houses of home.

I turned and began the treacherous walk across the Field. My actions were clear enough. Glumly, the troops fell in behind me.

The crossing itself was another battle. Enemies accosted us at every turn, and the blood of our foes ran blue and red and green across our blades. The thorns and bristles of the Field proved to be nothing compared to the violent warriors we met along the way. The plants' vaunted thirst for blood seemed a proctor's tale to young spinagons. On the other hand, we fed the nettles well enough with the lives of enemies and traitors — the plants saw no need to take ours.

Of course, we sustained our own losses along the way, but I am proud to report that my skills proved worthy of the task. I led my command to reinforce the Greater Fifth Squadron of the Thirteenth Army in time for the Battle of Thorns.

I fell in that clash, but my achievements won me this place of honor. I hope that my tale can inspire and lead those who come after me.

— the skull of Harasnah the Younger, red abishai (baatezu)

I +HΘUGH+
THE GRAY WAS+E
HAD NΘ COLΘRS.
THIS
LΘOKS
ND ΘF. . . RED.
— A CLUELESS
PALADIN

◆ BACKGROUND ◆

The battles of the Blood War have raged for longer than mortals have known life, the conflict's savagery and hatred fueling the dreams, desires, and obsessions of the multiverse. One way or another, the war spills through all the layers of existence, and little escapes its influence. Some clashes have consequences that shake the Lower Planes. Others are far less meaningful — they're fought solely for the sake of violence and killing.

"The Field of Nettles" is set in the aftermath of an especially pointless battle. The adventure rips the player characters from their comfortable lives and thrusts them into the Blood War full force. Their goal is to cross one of the more infamous battlefields, seeing the scope and the power of the fighting — and hopefully coming away with a greater understanding of just how big the Blood War is.

The adventure is designed for a party of 4–6 PCs of 5th–8th level. The characters don't get to save the multiverse, nor do they find the key to unlock the dark of any great secrets. But they might come to realize their importance (or lack of it) in the scheme of things. On the fickle borders of the planes, that can be worth almost as much.

THE FIELD OF NETTLES

The Field of Nettles ranks high in the foolishness of the Blood War. It's hosted thousands, even millions of battles, each wasting more lives than the last. The Field is a place of constant struggle where the lives of billions have been wiped from the planes, leaving only moldering bones to mark their passing. And the worst part is that it's not even a site of strategic importance.

Found in Oinos, the first layer of the Gray Waste, the Field is about 300 miles on a side. Though it seems impossible, the Field is bounded on two sides by the River Styx. On one end, the river flows from Baator toward the Abyss, and carries the baatezu to the fighting. On the other end, the river churns from the Abyss toward Baator, and allows the tanar'ri to reach the Field. The ground in between the two camps . . . well, it's just littered with nasties and dangers that'd make most berks barney. And that's where the bulk of the fighting takes place.

The parts of the Field that aren't covered with bodies and the accompanying corruption are rolling hills, jagged rocks, deep clefts, and patches of the nettle from which the Field takes its name. The thistles sometimes reach 30 feet in height, their rough-edged branches providing a special caress to any sod who comes too close (for specifics, see "Hazards of the Field," on the next page). The spikes are hollow, and like the proboscis of a mosquito, they allow the plant to drain the fluids of anything stuck there too long. It ain't an uncommon sight to see a withered corpse hanging in the nettles, every drop of life long since sucked away.

The other physical features of the Field — ravines, bluffs, outcroppings, and so on — all play their own part in the fighting, whether they act as camouflage, hiding places for deserters, or sites for numerous last stands. Blood has spilled across just about every square inch of the ground's surface. Fact is, most places have soaked up hundreds of gallons of life, and it's said that the blood of fiends makes the nettles so fierce and tough.

Otherwise, the Field of Nettles is much like everywhere else on the Gray Waste. Vibrant colors start to fade immediately, losing their luster and drifting toward gray. They turn entirely gray within a week of coming onto the Waste. 'Course, in a place where *everything* is gray, even the most muted colors stand out like a beacon.

For more on the Field, see "Sites and Skirmishes" in *The Dark of the War*.

I DON'T SEE
ANY DEAD FIENDS, EITHER
IN FACT, I CAN'T SEE
ANYTHING BUT
SLOPPY HILLS
OF . . .
OH
— THE SAME PRIME
+ UMBLING TO
THE DARK OF IT

GETTING AROUND

Player characters who try to cross the Field of Nettles might have a harder time than they'd think. Not only do flight and teleportation fail, but the Gray Waste has a way of making sure that berks who think too much never get where they're going.

FLIGHT: Within the confines of the Field, most flying ain't allowed. It's surmised that the nettles themselves suck a flyer back down to the land (though there's little evidence to support that theory). Anyone who tries to lift off usually rises about 10 feet above the ground, and then gets yanked back down — hard. Victims suffer 1d6 points of damage. Those who try to cross the boundaries of the Field while soaring *higher* than 10 feet also crash, suffering 1d6 points of damage for every 10 feet fallen.

The only sods who can take to the air are small, natural fliers with wingspans of 3 feet or less (like stirges).

TELEPORTATION: No one can teleport into Oinos, or teleport from place to place within the layer. If the PCs want to make it from one side of the Field to the other, they must do it the hard way — by putting one foot in front of the other.

On the other hand, no teleportation also means that the fiends encountered can't *gate* in allies (thus, the ability is not listed in the fiends' statistics).

CONCENTRATION: On the Gray Waste, a body's got to know where he's going — and then not worry about it too much. Anyone who concentrates on reaching a particular destination moves about 10 times slower than someone who just doesn't care. A traveler's got to get in tune with the hopelessness of the plane; only those who squelch their desire to "get there" will actually do it.

HAZARDS OF THE FIELD

In "The Field of Nettles," the PCs must contend with the blood-draining thorns of the Field, the disease that runs rampant in Oinos, and the sapping apathy of the Gray Waste in general.

THE NETTLES: As the PCs move through the Field, the DM should decide when they get too close to a patch of nettles. At that point, each involved character must make a Dexterity check with a -2 penalty. Those who fail brush up against the nettles and stick, suffering 1d8 points of bleeding damage in that round (and each succeeding round of contact). A stuck PC must succeed at a saving throw vs. paralysis in order to pull free. If a sod fails the save, he can try again the next round, but each save after the first is made with a cumulative -1 penalty.

'Course, the victim's comrades can try to pull him out or cut him free, but each helper must make a Dexterity check at -2 to avoid getting stuck himself.

DISEASE: Oinos is a layer of sickness. Every day a body's here, he has a 10% noncumulative chance of contracting the "wasting disease." This malady saps the Strength, Dexterity,

Constitution, and Charisma of its victims — each ability loses one point per day. When all four abilities reach 0, the victim dies. A *cure disease* spell stops the drain, and lets the victim recover one lost point in each ability every day.

APATHY: Everything on the Gray Waste tends toward dullness and apathy. That, in turn, drags down anyone who comes here. One week after entering the plane, each PC must start saving vs. spell to hold onto his hopes and dreams.

Each PC must make the save once a week. If a sod ever fails the save, he's caught by the apathy of the Waste and begins to lose sight of his identity. In 1d6 months, the victim will simply surrender to gloom and wander off into the far reaches of the plane. No one knows what becomes of those lost to the Waste, but it's thought that they turn into larvae — the mindless, wriggling hordes of the plane.

As soon as a PC fails his weekly save, the DM should ask the player to role-play a descent into apathy, marked by a gradual loss of ambition and will to struggle. Note that a victim's friends can try to cast *charm* on the sod to restore his faith in life. As long as he's been under the plane's influence for two weeks or less, the magic shields him from the draining apathy for the duration of the spell plus one week.

THE ADVENTURE'S FLOW

One way or another, the party's approached by agents of Spiral Hal'oight, a well-known merchant (and secret arms dealer) who wishes to hire the group for a delicate task. After some haggling, the PCs should agree to retrieve battle plans from the keep of a fallen baatezu commander. 'Course, the keep just happens to be on the Field of Nettles, but a particularly fierce battle has just been fought there — there shouldn't be too many survivors to threaten the party. Once the PCs have been equipped and outfitted, their employer sends them on their way to the Gray Waste.

No matter how they travel, the characters arrive in the tanar'i staging area. From there, they must pick their way through the Field until they reach the baatezu encampment. Depending on the course the sods take, they encounter things strange and fascinating, uplifting and degrading.

Some are dangerous, others helpful, and a few might even be a combination of the two.

It takes the PCs some time to cross the 300-mile-wide Field.

Even at top speed, the party can't hope to make it in less than

I'VE +TRIED
BLEEDING ALREADY.
DIDN'+ LIKE IT.

— A SENSE+
REFUSING +O VISIT+
+HE FIELD OF NETTLES

two to three weeks (remember, teleportation is impossible). Along with the way, they see millions of corpses, each in varying states of decay; they may well become numb to the horror of all the death before too long.

Eventually, they reach the baatezu side of the Field of Nettles. There, they can explore the (seemingly) abandoned encampment, check out the commander's keep, and dig up the sought-after battle plans. Then, it should be a simple matter to return the prize to their employer in Sigil. It should be . . . but it might not turn out that way.

THE FACTIONS

If any of the PCs belong to factions, they might seek advice from their comrades or factols in Sigil. Here's what each of the factions thinks about Spiral's offer:

THE ATHAR, BELIEVERS OF THE SECRET, BREAK CABAL, DOOMGUARD,

DUNSMEN, and FREE LEAGUE: None of these factions has any special use for the plans of the baatezu, nor for the arms dealer who wants them. Likewise, they don't much care if the plans are retrieved. Faction members can go or stay — it's up to them.

THE FATED: If the arms dealer can't get the plans himself, it's likely that he won't be able to force the party into turning them over to him. Besides, most members of the Fated will probably consider keeping the plans, anyway.

THE FRATERNITY OF ORDER: Knowledge is power. If a Guvner PC can get a good look at the plans before turning them over to the arms dealer, there's a good chance that the Guvners can profit as well.

THE HARMONIUM and MERCYKILN: The lawful factions are always keen on restoring and upholding order, and plans are a part of lawful behavior. Best to get them before they fall into the wrong hands.

THE REVOLUTIONARY LEAGUE: Baatezu plans, eh? Any time a berk can get his hands on plans, it's a bet that the Anarchists can find a way to turn 'em against those who hold the reins of power.

THE SIGN OF ONE and TRANSCENDENT ORDER: Not much to think about, really. A factioneer's just got to do what he chooses to do — not what someone else tells him to do.

THE SOCIETY OF SENSATION: Not many folks get a chance to savor the taste of the Blood War firsthand. That's enough of a reason for a Sensate PC to go along on the trip.

THE XAOSHETS: Whatever.

◆ IT BEGINS ◆

The PCs should be approached by agents of the aasimar arms dealer Spiral Hal'oight (Pl/♂ aasimar/F6,T7/Believers of the Source/N). He's well known around Sigil as a blood who can get a body most anything desired. By the time the adventure begins, chant of the PCs' exploits has reached

Spiral's ears. He's convinced that the party is the best place to turn for help — and that he can buy their assistance for a good price, too.

The adventure can begin in Sigil, or anywhere on the planes. Three of Spiral's agents hunt down the PCs no matter where they are, and offer them employment — a "quick job," they call it. 'Course, the harder the agents have to search, the less likely they are to take "no" for an answer.

The three agents are:

- ◆ Jouana (Pl/♀ tiefling/F4/Fated/N), a stubborn warrior who's likely to try to force the PCs to come with them regardless;
- ◆ The skittish Karliff Minstrel (Pr/♂ halfling/B3/NG), whose main redeeming feature is his ability to spin a tale;
- ◆ The Redoubtable (Pl/♂ human/M5/Free League/N), a forgettable spellslinger whose face, clothing, and even magic is without flourish — although he does get the job done.

The trio offers to escort the PCs to their employer's fine home in The Lady's Ward of Sigil. They won't reveal the name of their boss, only that he wants to make the group a business offer. The agents say that the PCs will receive 1,000 gp for simply hearing him out. If the characters refuse the job opportunity, they can keep the money and walk out without fear of recrimination. Only a soddin' loon would turn that down.



◆ SPIRAL'S HOUSE ◆

Spiral's made enough jink from the sale of arms around the planes to afford a top-shelf home in The Lady's Ward (though he tries to keep the true nature of his business quiet). Naturally, security around his case is tight — very tight. Guards watch from towers and nearly concealed embrasures in the walls, and the very air seems to tingle with the electricity of potential magic. And that's just in the front yard.

As the PCs approach the house, show the players the picture of Spiral's mansion on page 4 of Visions of War.

PCs native to Sigil might recognize the mansion from various stories they've probably heard about Spiral. Each native PC can make an Intelligence check; those who belong to the Free League, the Revolutionary League, or the Fraternity of Order (all information-heavy factions) get a +2 bonus to the check.

In any case, the three agents lead the PCs through the yard, exchanging hand signals and words with the obvious guards. The phrases are carefully couched, and the PCs should get the impression that all of the words have some meaning beyond the surface. Fact is, a *lingues* spell (if the PCs think to cast one) reveals that the actual phrases used

are passwords to confirm that the agents are who they appear to be.

As the PCs approach the house, a burly fellow named Annom (Pl/♂ human/F9/LN) opens the wide oak door. Annom is dressed like a butler, but he looks more like a bodyguard. Once the party is inside, he gestures to a hall closet on the right — a cloakroom for the PCs' outerwear — and a closet on the left — a veritable armory of gear, spellbooks, and bags of spell components. The three agents divest themselves of obvious weapons, and wait for the PCs to do the same.

If any PCs seem peery about giving up their treasured items, the tiefling Jouana assures them (with some bitterness) that the place is well watched and well guarded.

Annom waits deferentially until the PCs are ready, and then leads them through the immense mansion (the three agents depart to another area of the house). The place looks far bigger on the inside than on the outside — it might just be a trick of the architecture, but in Sigil, anything's possible.

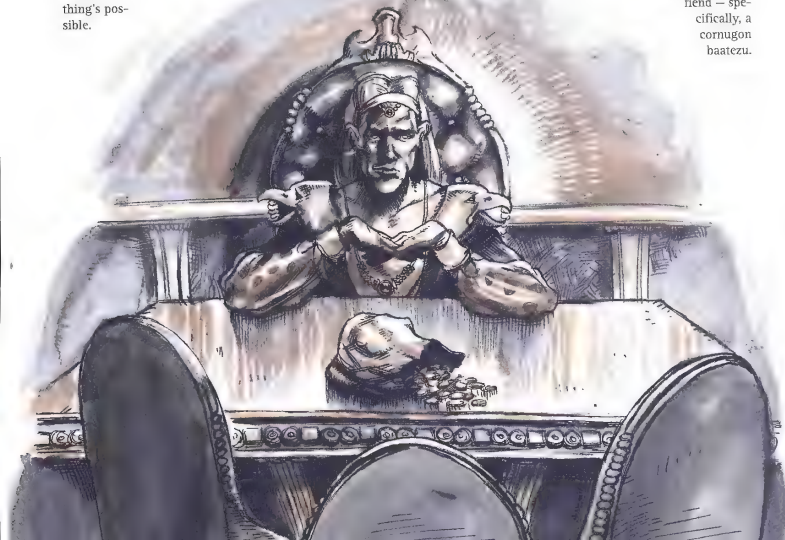
The butler/bodyguard leads the party through reek-walled passages and gardens of statuary, vibrant beauty emanating from nearly every tastefully decorated room. The mansion is the epitome of wealth; the PCs can tell that Spiral does very well indeed.

Eventually, Annom ushers the party into a sitting room filled with stone furniture quarried from the marble pits of Mount Celestia. Cushions cover each bench, making the wait practically a delight. A pair of large ivory doors stand imposingly against the back wall. Large windows off to the right let in the green twilight haze of Sigil.

Annom leaves them, and the PCs must cool their heels for a while before they can get in to see Spiral. After half an hour of waiting, the PCs hear muted shouting from behind the ivory doors. Before they can act, the doors swing open into the sitting room. A thin, tight-lipped human male, dressed entirely in purple, stomps out, marches past the party, and continues through as if he's determined to find the mansion's exit. A pair of servants, nearly identical to Annom, also emerge from beyond the ivory doors and fall into step behind the departing visitor.

A melodious voice from the inner room calls out, "You folks can come in now."

A PC with true sight or the equivalent can see that the thin visitor's really a polymorphed fiend — specifically, a cornugon baatezu.



IN THE SANCTUM

The inner room is dark and red, mahogany wood absorbing the light and reflecting back only the dimmest portion of it — except for the pool of light focused squarely on the dark desk in the back of the room, a high-backed chair dimly visible behind it. The rest of the room is dark as well, but the PCs can see that the chamber is tastefully appointed and full of closed display cases. Chairs surround the desk, just enough for the entire party to sit. A sack that seems to bulge with coins rests on the center of the immaculate desk.

As the PCs enter the room, a stir of motion from the great chair behind the desk draws their eyes. From the darkness comes light as Spiral Hal'ought leans forward, his silver hair and silver eyes catching the light. He's nearly beautiful, his face carefully sculpted into perfection, his eyes soft and hard at the same time, his cheekbones high. When he speaks, it's like the sound of golden church bells — deep, but alluring.

"I'm glad you could make it," says the man, not rising. "I am Spiral Hal'ought. Perhaps you've heard of me. Please take the bag on the table. It's the gold I promised you simply for listening. Count it if you like — there are a thousand coins."

The silver-haired man pauses for only a few seconds, clearly expecting you not to insult him by actually rooting through the jink. "I assume you've heard of the Blood War?"

He waits for the PCs to respond before continuing.

"On the dreadful Gray Waste, there is a battleground called the Field of Nettles. It's hotly contested land, a site the fiends have struggled over for years — powers know why. A bloody clash there has just ended, and I've received word that both armies — baatezu and tanar'ri — were nearly wiped out. Do you know what that means?"

"It means that the commanders' tents are sure to be deserted. It means that resourceful cutters — like you — could slip in, get the battle plans of the baatezu, and sell them to someone willing to pay — like me. A mutually beneficial transaction, I assure you."

If pressed as to why he wants the plans, Spiral merely notes that, in his business, such information is quite valuable. Rather than come right out and admit that he sells weapons, the aasimar dances around the topic, couching everything in terms suited for respectable ears (even if he thinks the PCs already know the truth). The plans outline Baator's strategies for the next 100 days of the Blood War, but Spiral says only that they'll help him "better understand the tug and pull of the fighting."

Payment for the job is negotiable. If the PCs are interested in mere money, Spiral starts with an offer of 5,000 gp but goes as high as 10,000 gp. He also notes to himself that the PCs are beings of coarse desires, and will try to take advantage of that fact later (perhaps in a future adventure).

If the PCs want something more exotic, Spiral can pro-

vide them with a magical weapon that, he's fairly sure, is unique. It's a spear said to have struck down an Abyssal lord, worth a fortune to the right buyer. The spear, called *Chaosreaver*, is +2, +4 *vs. tanar'ri* when used in the Abyss (that's where the weapon was forged).

If the PCs ask for information, they're in luck. Spiral's got his finger on many different pulses, and chances are he can dig up whatever chant — names, maps, trails of knowledge lost to antiquity — the party needs.

As for favors, Spiral's contacts extend into many different lines of work. He's happy to help the PCs get rid of an irritating enemy or construct something of value. In all cases, the aasimar either knows a blood who can help, or he pulls in favors to get the job done for free. (Naturally, the DM shouldn't let Spiral agree to any favor that could ruin this or any other adventure.)

Whatever the payment — jink, *Chaosreaver*, chant, or favors — the PCs don't get it until they've put the baatezu plans in Spiral's hands.

THE DECISION

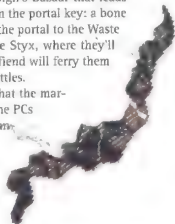
Once Spiral has explained the job and stated the price he's willing to pay, he leans back in his chair. Glints of light bounce from his hair and eyes, reminding the PCs that he's waiting for their answer. Spiral wants a decision *now* — if the PCs ask to sleep on it, he simply sends his agents out to find other bashers more amenable to his offer.

If the PCs agree to take the task on their shoulders, Spiral's delighted. He helps them outfit and supply themselves, even picking up part of the tab. Any PCs who don't own magical weapons can buy a few Sigil-forged pieces through Spiral. It'll cost 'em, but it's a necessary expense — most critters on the Gray Waste can't be harmed by ordinary weapons. (For double the price, Spiral can arrange for the PCs to get Gray Waste-forged weapons, which'll operate at full power on that plane.)

Spiral also provides the PCs with a map of the Field of Nettles so they can approach the area any way they'd like. (The map is found on pages 18–19 of *Visions of War*; show it to the players.)

What's more, Spiral offers suggestions on how to get to and through the Waste. He favors the River Styx, and he's willing to drop the jink necessary to pay off a marraenoloth boatman. If the PCs agree to take this route, Spiral provides them with directions to a portal in Sigil's Bazaar that leads to the Gray Waste. He also gives them the portal key: a bone from a hordling. The PCs are to take the portal to the Waste and then hoof it to the shores of the Styx, where they'll meet up with the marraenoloth. The fiend will ferry them to the baatezu end of the Field of Nettles.

Spiral makes sure to point out that the marraenoloth will be paid in advance. The PCs shouldn't give it any further jink — unless, of course, they want to make sure that it won't betray them.



◆ LEAVING SIGIL ◆

Most likely, the PCs take Spiral's advice and use the portal to the River Styx. They must travel to the crowded, vibrant Bazaar in Sigil's Market Ward; the portal is a large wreath of black roses fixed to the side of a flower merchant's tent.

The DM should let the PCs poke around the noisy marketplace for as long as they wish. When they finally find the wreath of roses, the PC who holds the hordling bone must wave it within the circle. The five-foot-wide wreath then begins to glow red, the center glimmering with gray. PCs who step through the wreath come out in Oinos, the first layer of the Gray Waste.

◆ A WASTING GLOOM ◆

Once all the PCs have stepped through the portal, read the following to them.

You feel as if all your senses have been wrapped in thick cotton, filtering out all the input you receive. Everything around you is gray, gray, gray, as far as the eyes can see. Compared to the hustle and bustle of Sigil, this place seems lifeless and dull. You can see why they call it "the Waste."

Rocks and stunted trees litter the ground, their jagged edges and branches thrusting into the sky like uncaring bones. There's no sense of vitality in the stone or wood; all life has been sapped by the apathetic Waste.

Fact is, your clothes stand out brightly, their colors like beacons in a muddy fog. But even as you watch, you see the vibrancy of the cloth slowly start to fade, so that it might be more like the Waste around it.

In the distance, you can see a black river boiling across the plain like a huge, diseased worm. It looks to be miles away.

If the PCs trek toward the river — the Styx, naturally — they see plenty of life, which is strange for a place that's supposed to be so dead and empty. Sleek nightmares gallop across the horizon, and cruel night hags drive armies of larvae across the plains far to the left. The creatures won't bother the PCs unless the heroes do something to attract their hostile attention. True, the PCs' colors stand out in the dull light of the layer, but the hags and the mares have more urgent matters on their hands. Something seems to be afoot, and the Gray Waste is comparatively abuzz.

SLEEPING THE BLINDS: If the PCs choose not to travel on the River Styx, they must journey for about two weeks to reach the Field of Nettles. During that time, the DM should have them make saving throws to avoid the apathy and disease of the Waste. What's more, the party'll probably run into several creatures that don't have friendly intentions toward anyone that lives or moves.

SAILING THE STYX

No matter where they PCs head for the River Styx, the marraenoloth waits for them on the shore. The boatman's been paid by Spiral's agents to meet the party, but it wants to try to squeeze even more jink out of unwary PCs.

A small wooden skiff floats at the shore of the dark river, and in the boat stands a tall figure draped in a night black robe. It leans on a sturdy staff, seeming neither impatient nor calm. As you approach, it straightens its spindly body and extends a long, bony hand. Though the gaunt, stretched face within the black hood does not speak, you hear a raspy voice in your minds: Payment before you board.

The PCs are likely to refuse, claiming (quite rightly) that the boatman should have been paid already. The marraenoloth won't argue or beg for coins. It simply steps aside, allows them to board the skiff, and pushes off down the Styx. However, the creature resolves to drop the party at the tanar'ri end of the Field of Nettles, so that to reach their goal they must cross the entire battleground. 'Course, the PCs have no way of knowing that, and they can do nothing to prevent the treachery.

The marraenoloth's skiff is small but watertight, though it looks like it might spring a leak at any time. It rocks back and forth in the sluggish-seeming water, threatening to capsize at any time. Each PC must make a Dexterity check to keep from contacting the water (only one check is needed for the entire journey). Any sod who touches or tastes the foul liquid must successfully save vs. spell or lose all memory of his past life; those who succeed still lose all memory of the past day.

The trip itself is something out of a dream — or a nightmare. The marraenoloth stands at the helm of the craft, unmoving throughout the whole journey. The Styx wanders through gray plains and ravines, sometimes fast and furious, other times barely creeping. The journey lasts for hours, days, or even weeks (it's longest for PCs who concentrate on reaching their destination). While on the river, the characters' clothing and possessions don't lose their color, and the PCs' minds don't weaken; apparently, the Styx is proof against such draining.

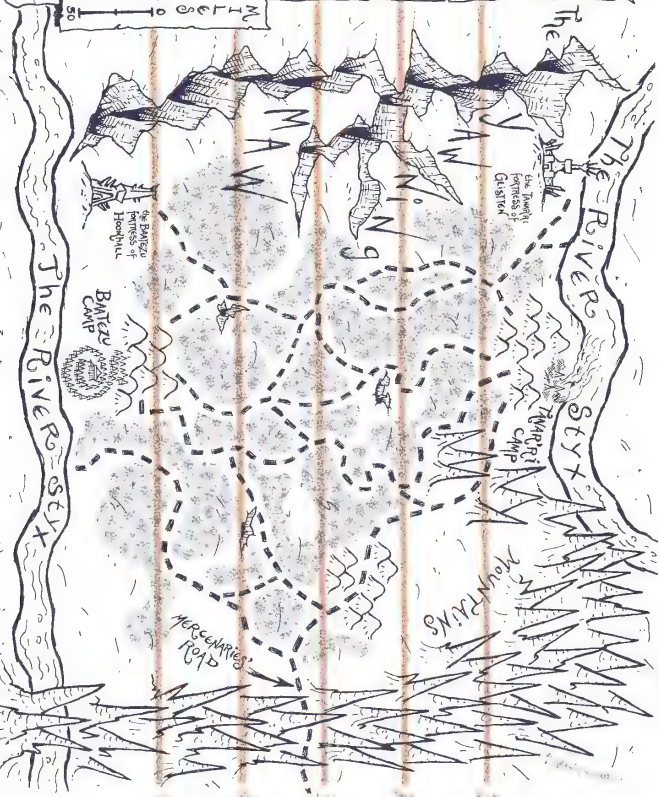
Eventually, the marraenoloth deposits the PCs on a spit of land. Without a word, the boatman turns and poles its skiff off into the river's rising mist, disappearing within moments.

SLEEPING THE BLINDS: Even if the PCs fork over a fortune in gold, gems, or magical items, the marraenoloth still berries them to the tanar'ri end of the Field of Nettles. It's determined to betray them no matter what (in revenge for a past transgression committed by Spiral).

If the PCs attack the marraenoloth, the creature can't teleport away (the power doesn't work in Oinos). It tries to dump them out of the skiff and sail off down the Styx, but it fights to the death rather than let the PCs gain control of the boat. If the party kills the fiend and commandeers

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the vessel, the characters find it difficult – if not impossible – to steer the craft safely down the river.

Marraenoloth (yugoloth): AC -1; MV 18; HD 10+20; hp 64; THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (fangs); SA gaze, spell-like powers; SD +1 or better weapons to hit; MR special; SZ

M (5' tall); ML champion (15); Int exceptional (16); AL NE; XP 7,000.

Notes: The marraenoloth has 80% magic resistance to 1st-level spells; MR decreases by 5% for each higher level of spells.

SA—victim of gaze must save vs. spell or suffer *fear*.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *alter self, animate dead, cause disease* (reverse of *cure disease*), *charm person, improved phantasmal force, produce flame*, and *teleport without error*.



◆ APPROACHING THE FIELD ◆

Whether the PCs arrive at the Field by sailing the Styx or finding their own route, the first things they notice about the site are the sounds. Fact is, as they get within several miles of the battleground, they hear nothing but the growling moans of the dying and the furiously pained screams of the wounded. The chilling cries resound across the great expanse of the huge Field.

If the PCs arrive with the marraenoloth, they start on the tanar'ri end of the Field, far from the baatezu commander's tent. If they make their own way to the Field, the DM should use every trick in his power to make sure that the characters still end up on the tanar'ri side (turn the plane around, if necessary). After all, the whole point of the adventure is the crossing.

Refer to the DM's map of the Field on page 11 of this book.

BLOODY GROUND

At the edge of the tanar'ri side of the Field of Nettles, there's not much to see. A natural bluff stands nearby; if the PCs climb to the top, they can peer out across almost the entire span of the 300-mile-wide Field (there's no curve to the ground here).

Sprawling out before you are two sets of encampments — one quite near to you, and the other barely visible on the horizon line. Near the far camp, you can make out another river, and a bluff similar to the one you're standing on now. It's easy to picture the commanders of two armies directing their forces from atop the twin knolls.

In between lies the fabled Field of Nettles, a vast ground of vegetation and debris. Fact is, the space between the two camps seems to be piled high with mounds of junk — you can't tell what it is from here — and natural paths lie between the towering heaps. As you watch, some of the avenues cave in and disappear as the surrounding rubble collapses and buries them, though the "mudslides" also open up new paths through the debris.



The PCs probably won't realize the incredible distance between the two ends of the Field. Most likely, they'll first make their way to the closer encampment — the one used by the tanar'ri during the recent violent battle.

The chaotic fiends' camp is about 35 miles to a side. A slight wind has kicked up, rippling the gray cloth of the tents, carrying a stench of foetor and death with it. There's not a sound from any of the tents, as all the tanar'ri — even those assigned to stay and guard the camp — rushed out to do battle with the baatezu.

The ripped tents lie scattered about the Field, strewn haphazardly wherever their owners decided they'd lie best. The larger tents are on the better patches of ground; the worst are in beds of nettles or perched precariously on the edges of ravines. Some have blown down, leaving their contents to be picked over by scavengers, but the camp's so messy, it's hard to tell if it's been looted or not. A few corpses lie in the blood and mud, slowly liquefying.

The tents hold nothing of real value, though there might be a gem or a dagger or two lying in the gray dust. If the PCs consider the general sloppiness of the camp — or if they take a closer look at the cambion, vrock, and alu-fiend corpses — they should be able to tell that they're at the tanar'ri end of the Field. What's more, many of the worthless items left in the tents sport the symbol of the Abyss: an infinity symbol on its side, pierced by a downward arrow.

Naturally, that means that the PCs must trek through the mounds of debris to reach the baatezu camp. Once they decide to head out, they leave the tanar'ri tents behind and quickly learn what the piles of refuse really are.

What you see are huge piles of smoking corpses, tanar'ri and baatezu, heaped upon each other by the hundreds, by the thousands, by the millions. Fiends of all varieties lie quiet about the Field, and if what you now see continues to the other side, the Field of Nettles must be a graveyard for a billion dead fiends.

No, not a graveyard, exactly, for the corpses still rot and stink in the air. The cries of the wounded blend with the calls of scavengers hoping to pick the bones clean. The stench of death fills your lungs, and it's only the deadening influence of the Gray Waste that keeps you from keeling over — or going mad.

Despite the occasional scream and slight rustle of movement, signs of life are few and far between. The Field of Nettles is really a great charnel house, filled with the stinking, splayed bodies of the dead. Paths twist and weave through corpse-mounds that rise as high as 50 feet, the bodies at the bottom slowly gelling under the constant pressure from above. Fact is, most of the ground throughout the Field is soft, thanks to the liquids squeezed out from the corpses. The bodies long dead have already turned gray, while fresher carcasses still drip with multicolored blood.

As the PCs look out over the battleground, show the players the picture of the Field of Nettles on page 5 of Visions of War.

To fulfill their mission, the heroes must make their way through this foul slaughterhouse.

THE CROSSING

The trip across the Field of Nettles should take the PCs at least two to three weeks, assuming they travel quickly and can find a steady path. The next few pages present encounters they're likely to have during the crossing. Some are random, while others occur at set places (marked with the numbers 1-5 in the text and on the DM's map). As the PCs cross the Field, the DM can run encounter 1 anytime after they cross the line marked 1, encounter 2 anytime after they cross the line marked 2, and so on. But the DM should also feel free to change the location and difficulty of the encounters to better match the strength and traveling plans of the party.

The player's map (in the *Visions of War* book) isn't broken down by lines. What's more, it lacks clear views of the fiends' encampments and fortresses, and it doesn't show all of the paths on the DM's map.

The paths are important. If the PCs stick to the roads, they can stay clear of the Field's nettles without having to make Dexterity checks, though they're more likely to have random encounters. If they avoid the roads, they reduce the chance of random encounters, but they must deal with the blood-draining nettles. It's a trade-off.

◆ RANDOM ENCOUNTERS ◆

Just because the battle's over doesn't mean that all life has fled the Field of Nettles. Countless creatures of the plane survive by picking through the bones and refuse of the dead. Some are cowardly, fleeing at the first sign of resistance, while others – even mortal travelers – challenge all comers for their food or booty. The heaps of the dead even hold a few survivors of the battle, fiends or slaves looking to find a way out before the next struggle begins.

The DM's encouraged to alter or add to the list of monsters below.

Black abishai (baatezu) (3): AC 5; MV 9, Fl 12 (C); HD 4+1; hp 29, 21, 18; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d4+1 (claw/claw/tail); SA poison, spell-like powers; SD regeneration, +1 or better weapons to hit; SW holy water; MR 30%; SZ L (8' tall); ML average (9); Int average (9); AL LE; XP 7,000 each.

Notes: The three abishai are the last of the Dark Twelves, an elite aerial strike force. They can't want to fight, but they will if pressed. They can't fly on the Field.

SA—victims struck by tail must save vs. poison or die.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illusion*, *animate dead*, *change self*, *charm person*, *command*, *infravision*, *know alignment* (always active), *produce flame*, *pyrotechnics*, *scare*, *suggestion*, and *teleport without error*.

SD—regenerates 1 hp per round except for damage caused by holy water/item.

SW—holy water causes 2d4 points of damage.

Lemure (baatezu) (5): AC 7; MV 3; HD 2; hp 10 each; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (claws); SD regeneration, immune to mind-affecting spells; SZ M (5' tall); ML never checked; Int semi (2); AL LE; XP 120 each.

Notes: The lemures travel without a leader, and have no idea what they're doing or where they're going. If the PCs project a confident demeanor, the lemures will leave them alone.

SD—regenerates 1 hp per round, even after "slain," unless destroyed by holy water/items.

Nupperibo (baatezu) (13): AC 9; MV 6; HD 1; hp 5 each; THACO 19; #AT 2; Dmg 1d2/1d2 (claw/claw); SD regeneration, immune to mind-affecting spells; SZ M (5' tall); ML never checked; Int non (0); AL LE; XP 120 each.

Notes: The mindless nupperibos attack anything they see, fighting until destroyed. If the PCs can get away before the nupperibos regenerate, the fiends won't pursue.

SD—regenerates 1 hp per round, even after "slain," unless destroyed by holy water/items.

Larva (30): AC 7; MV 3; HD 1-1; hp 4 each; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+1 (bite); SA wounding, disease; SZ M (5' long); ML unreliable (3); Int semi (2); AL NE; XP 35 each.

Notes: The wriggling larvae spawn from the piles of bodies on the Field. They generate spontaneously, and they're hungry for something besides the rotting corpses of fiends.

SA—bite bleeds for 1 hp per round until bound.

SA—victim of bite must save vs. poison or contract a skin rot (cured by *cure disease*) that saps 4 hp/day (after the first three weeks) and eventually kills him (after one month).

Manes (tanar'ri) (10): AC 8; MV 6; HD 1; hp 6 each; THACO 20; #AT 3; Dmg 1d2/1d2/1d4 (claw/claw/bite); SA acidic vapor, spell-like powers; SD reformation, immune to mind-affecting spells; MR 10%; SZ S (3' tall); ML never checked; Int semi (2); AL CE; XP 975 each.

Notes: The 10 manes are sticking together only until they can get back to the Abyss. Meanwhile, they're wreaking as much havoc as they think they can get away with.

SA—when slain, dissipates into a cloud of acidic vapor; all within 10 feet must save vs. poison or suffer 1d6 points of damage.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *darkness* 15' radius, *infravision*, and *teleport without error*.

SD—"dead" manes reforms from vapor in 24 hours.

Bar-igura (tanar'ri) (2): AC 0; MV 9, Cl 15; HD 6+6; hp 37, 31; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6/2d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA spring attack, spell-like powers; SD camouflage; MR 30%; SZ M (5' tall); ML elite (13); Int low (7); AL CE; XP 8,000 each.

Notes: The bar-igura are shell-shocked and confused, and seek strong leadership. They'll try to sign on with the party until they realize that the PCs might not be as powerful as they are.

SA—can jump 40 feet and attack in the same round.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *change self* (2/day), *darkness 15' radius*, *detect invisibility*, *dispel magic*, *entangle*, *fear* (by touch), *infravision*, *invisibility* (2/day), *plant growth*, *spectral force* (2/day), *telekinesis*, and *teleport without error*.

SD—can spend one round changing color to camouflage itself (treat as a thief's hide in shadows ability at 95%).

Carriion crawler (6): AC 3 (head) or 7 (body); MV 12; HD 3+1; hp 18 each; THACO 17; #AT 1 or 8; Dmg 1d2 (bite) or 1d2x8 (tentacles); SA paralysis; SZ L (9' long); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 420 each.

Notes: The Field provides the crawlers with an unending food source. Still, a steady diet of fiend meal makes the crawlers cross and unpredictable, and they attack anyone who comes within 30 feet of their corpse of choice.

SA—victim struck by tentacle must save vs. paralysis or be paralyzed for 2d6 turns.

Stirge (30): AC 8; MV 3, Fl 18 (C); HD 1+1; hp 5 each; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (proboscis); SA blood drain; SZ S (2' wingspan); ML average (8); Int animal (1); XP 175 each.

Notes: Like the carriion crawlers, the stirges have adapted well to life in Oinos. They have all the blood they need, but still like it as fresh as possible. Able to fly on the Field, they rise from the mounds of corpses in a great wave, darkening the sky with their wings, and then swoop down on the party.

SA—drains victim of 1d4 hp (in blood) each round after the initial attack; stirge clings to victim unless it is killed or until it drains 12 hp.

Ultrloth (yugoloth): AC -8; MV 15, Fl 15 (C), Sw 15; HD 13+26; hp 101; THACO 7 (3 with Str); #AT 2; Dmg 1d12/1d12 (hand strikes) or 1d6+9 (spear, Str); SA fascination gaze, spell-like powers; SD infravision 240', never surprised, +3 or better weapons to hit; MR 60%; SZ M (6 1/2' tall); ML champion (16); Int supra-genius (20); AL NE; XP 26,000.

Notes: The ultrloth has Strength 21 (+4, +9). It roams the Field as an observer, watching the battles between the baatezu

and tanar'ri. The PCs will see the ultrloth all over the Field, but if they don't bother it, it won't bother them.

SA—victim who meets the ultrloth's gaze must save vs. spell or stop as if held.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *airwalk*, *alter self*, *animate dead*, *animate object*, *bind*, *call lightning*, *cause disease* (reverse of *cure disease*), *charm person*, *color spray* (7/day), *control winds*, *detect invisibility/lite/magic/poison/scrying* (always active), *ESP*, *fear*, *fire storm* (1/day), *geas*, *improved phantasmal force*, *know alignment* (always active), *mass suggestion* (1/day), *passwall*, *pass without trace* (always active), *produce flame*, *read magic* (always active), *shout*, *solid fog*, *symbol* (any type, 1/day), *teleport without error*, and *wall of fire*.

Personality: curious, aloof.

ENCOUNTER 1:

◆ THE TOWER OF BONES ◆

From the distance, it looks as though someone has built a large tower in the carnage. Bluish light plays lamently around its top, refracting off into the distance. The light darts away from the tower only to vanish into the gray haze moments later.

If the PCs draw nearer, they see that this gray tower sits in the middle of a clearing about 100 yards on a side. No bodies litter the ground, though they're heaped high around the perimeter of the clearing. A close look at the tower reveals that it's made of the bleached, stacked bones of fiends, humans, demihumans, and other unidentifiable creatures.

Worse yet, the tower seems to be slowly rising up out of the ground. At least, its top is growing upward; the bones at the bottom don't appear to be moving. As the PCs approach, the tower reaches a height of about 300 yards.

Any PC who makes an Intelligence check at -4 can see what's happening. The tower's building itself, sending the blue light off to strike the piled corpses across the Field. Any bodies struck begin to slough off their skin, and the bones disappear and reform within the tower's structure, high above the ground.

As the PCs watch, one of the lights lands on a nearby human corpse. As the dancing light touches the body, the man jerks and screams — he's still alive! The beam takes its time with the poor berk, almost as if it's relishing his pain.

Marel Talon (Pr/♂ human/F9/CN): AC 7 (Dex); MV 12; hp 74; THACO 12 (10 with Str, 9 with specialization); #AT 2; Dmg 1d8+7 (long sword, Str, specialization); SZ M (5' tall); ML elite (14).
• S 18/91 (+2, +5), D 17, C 15, I 10, W 8, Ch 12.

Personality: grateful, unpredictable.



JUST LET ME
GET BACK TO NORMAL!
— MAREL TALON

The light from the tower causes 1d10 points of damage (save vs. death magic for half) each round that it touches exposed flesh. In its search for flesh, the light can pass through any organic material, but not metal or stone.

If a PC tries to protect Marel by interposing a shield or his armored body, the light bounces off the metal, returns to the top of the tower, and searches for bones elsewhere (perhaps even going after the heroes). But if no one blocks the light ray, it devours the helpless Marel and then moves on to another corpse along the periphery of the clearing.

If the PCs save Marel, he's totally overwhelmed with surprise to find compassion on the Gray Waste. He's a sell-sword from Xaos (a gate-town on the Outlands), and he hoped to sign on with the baatezu army. While wandering through the Field, he threw himself into a mound of corpses to avoid a clash between fiends, and got stuck. The berk's crazy, no doubt about it (anybody who'd not wear armor in the Field of Nettles has to be). But he knows a way out of the killing ground — a hidden gate back to Xaos — and he's glad to share it with any PCs who've become sick of the place.

In conversation, Marel also casually mentions that he wandered through the empty baatezu encampment on the far side of the Field. He found a huge, abandoned structure sitting in the middle of a spiral of buildings, and he rested there for a bit. Before leaving, he set the dwelling afire — after all, who else would need to use it? He doesn't think he did a perfect job, but he's not eager to go back and check. Fact is, unless the PCs force him to stay, Marel heads for his secret gate to Xaos; he's had enough of the Blood War to last a good long time.



THE DARK OF THE TOWER

The tower's the result of a baatezu spell. The fiends hoped it would serve as an outpost during the next inevitable battle in the Field of Nettles. If the PCs do nothing, the tower builds itself to about a quarter-mile in height, then stops growing (the process takes about four more hours). At that point, the bluish light dies down, and the tower rearranges its interior to make rooms for its new inhabitants. It becomes immune to fire, cold, lightning, and acid; only a direct, massive assault can harm it. What's more, the tower opens only to a baatezu command word: *laraxfrin*.

Course, the PCs don't have to let that happen. They can

try to stop the tower from reaching its full height. While growing, the structure isn't immune to spells; any magic that affects bone or wood works similarly on the tower. The PCs can even burn it down or undermine its foundations.

If the PCs successfully interfere with the growth of the tower, the baatezu spell sputters out and the light fades into nothingness. Within a day, the whole thing slowly crumbles into its component bones.

ENCOUNTER 2: ◆ WINGED SNIPER ◆

If the PCs trudge through this section of the Field, they spy a pile of bodies that's a good sight taller than the rest. The corpses are heaped about 250 feet high, forming a steep, grisly hill — practically a tower — of decaying fiends. Like the tower of bones from encounter 1, the hill rests in a clearing — here, a space 200 yards wide. Four paths through nearby mounds lead into the clearing, one entrance at each cardinal point.

If the PCs enter the clearing and get within 50 yards of the hill, a succubus atop the giant pile of corpses attacks them. (From her vantage point, she's got an excellent view of the Field in all directions, so the party can't sneak up on her.) The succubus, Ricciani the Feathered, is armed with a plethora of *magic missile* scrolls, and she's not shy about using them on any berk who strays too near the hill. Ricciani barely survived the recent battle that produced the heaps of bodies, and she's desperate to make her way back to the tanar'ri end of the Field — and from there to the Abyss.

When the PCs enter the area, Ricciani fears that they're really polymorphed baatezu and fires her *magic missiles* at them. Once she begins firing, the PCs can flee the clearing (in which case she hurls the missiles at their backs) or climb the hill and try to stop her attack.

Course, climbing a giant, nearly vertical pile of bodies ain't easy. The PCs must clamber up 250 feet using fiend corpses as hand- and footholds. Ropes, pitons, and other tools don't make much difference. Basically, each PC climbs (in feet per round) at half his normal movement rate. (For more details, consult the climbing rules from Chapter 14 of the *PLAYER'S HANDBOOK*. On Table 67: Rates of Climbing, consider the hill's slope to be "rough with ledges" and "slightly slippery.")

The bodies nearest the bottom are quite decayed, and a misplaced hand or foot (10% chance per round) can release a cloud of noxious gas from the bloated corpse. The stinking vapor incapacitates every PC within 10 feet for 1d4 rounds.

What's more, each climbing PC must make a Dexterity check at a -2 penalty once every 10 rounds. If a sod fails the check, he accidentally puts his hand right into a fiend's corpse. The PC must then save vs. poison or inhale rotting bits of the body. This causes blindness for 1d6 rounds, and the victim gets sick for 1d6 days (all attack and damage rolls suffer a -2 penalty during that time).

Finally, each PC must make a Dexterity (or climbing proficiency) check every third round. Those who fail the check lose their grip and fall for 1d20 feet before they grab hold of a solid corpse (or hit the ground). For each foot fallen, the victim suffers 1d2 points of damage; horns, blades, and claws protrude from the pile of bodies, and they slice any berk who's not careful.

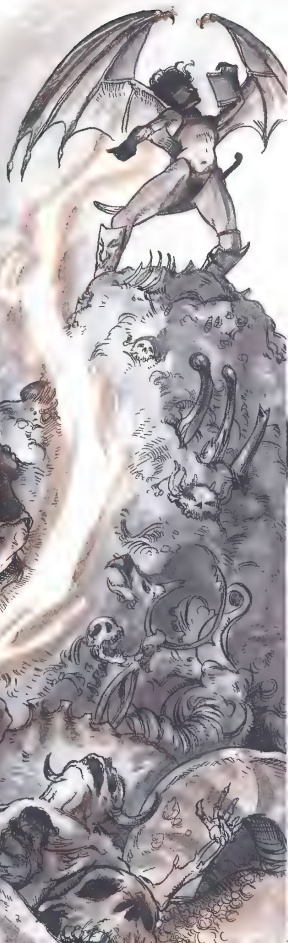
As soon as a body pulls himself onto the semiflat summit of the gruesome tower, he's face to face with Riccani the Feathered. The succubus directs all of her attacks at the new intruder. Convinced that her time is up, she defends herself furiously.

Riccani the Feathered (tanar'ri — succubus): AC 0; MV 12, FI 18 (C); HD 6; hp 34; THACO 15 (12 with dagger +3); #AT 2; Dmg 1d4+3/1d4+3 (dagger +3); SA energy drain, spell-like powers; SD never surprised, immune to all fire, +2 or better weapons to hit; MR 30%; SZ M (5½' tall); ML elite (14); Int exceptional (15); AL CE; XP 11,000.

SA—kiss saps one level from a victim, who must make a Wisdom check at -4 to notice the drain.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: become *ethereal*, *charm person*, *clairaudience*, *darkness* 15' radius, *ESP*, *infravision*, *shapechange*, *suggestion*, and *teleport without error*.

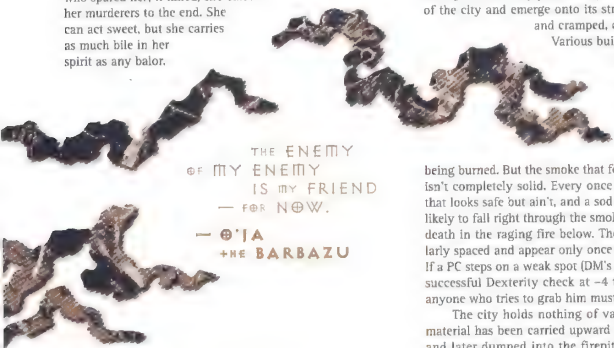
Special Equipment: dagger +3 (forged in the Abyss), 15 *magic missile* scrolls (each has four missiles).



If several PCs reach the top of the hill and Riccani is outnumbered (and losing the fight), she surrenders and tearfully throws herself on the mercy of the party. She gladly turns over her pouch of scrolls and her dagger +3 to demonstrate her "harmlessness." If the PCs kindly let her go, she won't attack them — at least, not right away. Instead, she subtly follows them and tries to strike when their guard is down.

If the PCs force Riccani to travel with them, she waits until she has a good chance of escaping, then slips away (in this case, her need for freedom is greater than her desire for malice). Otherwise, she starts to work her wiles on the likeliest male member of the party, trying to drive a wedge between the group.

Like all tanar'ri, Riccani can't be trusted one bit. If spared, she does her best to make life miserable for those who spared her; if killed, she curses her murderers to the end. She can act sweet, but she carries as much bile in her spirit as any balor.



THE ENEMY
OF MY ENEMY
IS MY FRIEND
— FOR NOW.
— O'JA
+ THE BARBAZU

◆ ENCOUNTER 3: ◆ A CITY IN FLAMES ◆

As the PCs approach this location, they begin to feel sweltering heat and smell burning flesh, and they notice a strange mass of smoke and flame in the sky. When they round enough corpse-mounds to get a good look, read:

At this location on the Field of Nettles is a large firepit about a mile across. It ain't empty, either — a huge gray fire rages eternally, fed by the greasy fat of dead fiends stacked around its edges. A slight slope leads down into the firepit, allowing the crushed, grilling corpses to slide right into the flames, which spit and hiss every time they consume another body. You think you'd better not get too close to the edge.

The flames lick high into the sky, and about 50 feet off the ground, they start to congeal, taking on some semblance of solid form. The fire and billowing smoke combine to form the foundation of a town that's suspended directly above the firepit. (Only a sod standing near the pit can see the city — from a distance, it just looks like odd clouds of flame and smoke in the air.)

The burg has buildings and roads, all formed out of gray fire and dirty smoke, and they slowly shift as the flames flicker and the smoke blows. But the town's harmless — the fire's lost its potency by the time it rises that far off the ground.

Getting up to the burg is surprisingly easy. An unknown fiend left behind a long, black metal ladder that bites into the smoky bottom layer and sticks. If the PCs climb the ladder (which, strangely, doesn't seem to get hot, despite the nearby flames), they pass through the spongelike foundation of the city and emerge onto its streets. The roads are small and cramped, curving every which way.

Various buildings rise and spiral, but none are taller than three stories — that high up, the wind'd shear off the tops rather abruptly. The PCs can walk around the fiery gray streets without fear of being burned. But the smoke that forms the city's foundation isn't completely solid. Every once in a while, there's a spot that looks safe but ain't, and a sod who steps without care is likely to fall right through the smoke and plummet to certain death in the raging fire below. These "potholes" are irregularly spaced and appear only once every few hundred yards. If a PC steps on a weak spot (DM's decision), he must make a successful Dexterity check at -4 to catch onto something; anyone who tries to grab him must make the same check.

The city holds nothing of value. Everything that was material has been carried upward by the flames and smoke, and later dumped into the firepit below. PCs may catch a glimpse of small smoky creatures (the original inhabitants of the burg), but they generally keep well out of sight. If cornered or captured, the creatures dissolve into smoke and dissipate into the air.

Throughout the city, the PCs see roving bands of tanar'ri scoping out various buildings, as if they're looking for something. Intent upon their task, the chaotic fiends leave the party alone unless the characters call undue attention to themselves.

If the PCs enter a building (no matter which one), they find O'ja, a battle-weary barbaz, sitting against the far wall. Its saw-toothed glaive lies chipped and broken by its side, but the fiend grabs the weapon as soon as the PCs open the flaming door. O'ja struggles to stand, coming to a clumsy crouch. Blood begins to seep from a makeshift bandage around its torso. The fiend grows a curse and staggers toward the party.

If the PCs present a strong show of force or try to pacify O'ja, it backs off for a moment. It's already suffered much at the hands of the tanar'ri roaming the city, and it's not at all keen on more fighting just at the moment. O'ja doesn't communicate with the PCs, but it won't attack them if they seem stronger — the fiend doesn't want to die at the hands of ordinary mortals.

No matter how the PCs handle O'ja, before long a small group of pitch-black cambions bursts into the building. They've hunted the wounded barbazus all over the city, and at last they've found him.

The cambions assume that the PCs have allied themselves with O'ja, and they attack the party just as readily as they do the lawful fiend. Though exhausted, the barbazus fight until slain.

O'ja (baatezu — barbazus): AC 3; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 24 (normally 43); THACO 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg d2/d2/d8 (claw/claw/beard) or 2d6 (glave); SA glave, disease, spell-like powers; SD +1 or better weapons to hit; MR 30%; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (11); Int low (6); AL LE.

SA—each wound inflicted by glave causes 2 points of bleeding damage per round until bound.

SA—wirelike beard attack transmits disease 25% of the time.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illusion*, *affect normal fires*, *animate dead*, *charm person*, *command*, *fear* (by touch), *infravision*, *know alignment* (always active), *produce flame*, *suggestion*, and *teleport without error*.

Personality: gruff, defensive.

Major cambion (tanar'ri) (4): AC 6; MV 15; HD 4; hp 27, 26, 23, 21; THACO 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (pair of short swords); SA spell-like powers; SD never surprised; MR 30%; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (13); Int average (10); AL CE; XP 4,000 each.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *darkness* 15' radius, *detect magic*, *infravision*, *levitate* (7/day), and *teleport without error*.

Thief Abilities: MS 80, HS 80, CW 95.

If the PCs defeat the tanar'ri in time to save O'ja's life, the barbazus helps them until it deems it has repaid the debt (and then tries to return to Baator). O'ja offers to lead them safely back to the ladder (it knows how to avoid the weak spots of the ground), give a truthful answer to any one question, or even show them the way to the former baatezu encampment at the edge of the Field of Nettles.

No matter what kind of help O'ja agrees to give, the lawful fiend follows the letter of its word and

nothing more. For example, if the PCs ask O'ja to lead them to the baatezu camp, it won't lift a finger to do anything else — not even to answer questions or fight off attackers.

THE REAL CHANT: O'ja spent a good deal of time at the baatezu camp before the fighting began. It knows the location of the pit fiend commander's keep and its general layout. The mansion's made up of many wings, each devoted to a particular ideal; O'ja guesses that the wing of strategy would be the one that held battle plans. But it doesn't know precisely where the plans would be, or even if they're still in the mansion at all. As far as O'ja knows, the plans might be on the commander's person — and the commander might be one of the millions of piled corpses.

ENCOUNTER 4: ♦ BLOOD IRRIGATION ♦

Because most of the Field of Nettles is littered with corpses, the soil constantly soaks up blood. Parts of the ground get so wet that they're almost like bogs — hardly ideal conditions for fighting. Thus, fiends work to clean up as much of the blood as possible.

The PCs come across evidence of this as they make their way through the Field. As they pass through 20-foot-high stands of nettles, they spy a pisciloth watching over a group of petitioners.

The crew is a gaunt, gray group of humans and tieflings, hopeless in their stares and their attitudes. Each holds a shovel or a pick, and they listlessly hack away at the dirty soil around a vast lake of blood and gore. It seems as if they're trying to dig a gutter to connect the lake to a nearby channel. The channel, in turn, runs all the way to the horizon, perhaps emptying into the River Styx.

The "foreman" of the group — a fish-tailed, lobsterlike pisciloth — picks up a fallen worker and throws her into the bloody lake. She lands just 10 feet from the shore, but as she begins to swim back, a great tentacle rises out of the muck behind her. It slashes down, dragging the victim beneath the sanguine surface, leaving only a froth of bubbles behind.

The rest of the crew continue to work, increasing their pace noticeably.

Within minutes, the petitioners dig the gutter so that it's just one shovel-stroke away from reaching the channel. If the PCs don't interfere, the pisciloth (whose name is Ussprk) shoves the petitioners into the bloody lake, one by one. More and more tentacles rise up, pulling the sods beneath the surface.

Once all the petitioners have drowned, the piscoloth picks up a shovel and breaks the last barrier himself. Usspr'k steps back out of the way, and the bloody flow pours down the gutter into the channel, roaring and spitting froth high into the air. Sluggish shapes break the surface, but for the most part, it's just a solid wall of blood rushing down the trench.

As the lake drains into the channel, the surrounding ground begins to lose its spongy quality, drying out visibly as the liquid thunders past.

The piscoloth doesn't tolerate any berks trying to break up his operation. Usspr'k has been assigned to drain this area of the Field of Nettles, and by the powers, that's what he's going to do. He doesn't mind stopping to talk to the PCs, but he fights viciously against any sod who tries to keep him from draining the land (or disposing of the petitioners).

Usspr'k (yugoloth — piscoloth): AC -5; MV 6, Sw 18; HD 9+18; hp 67; THACO 11; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8/2d8 (pincer/pincer); SA severing, sting, spell-like powers; SD never surprised, +1 or better weapons to hit; MR 40%; SZ M (5' tall); ML elite (13); Int very (11); AL NE; XP 19,000.

SA—on attack roll of 20, victim must save vs. paralyzation or lose an arm (60% chance) or a leg (40% chance). Metal armor grants +2 to the save; if the armor is magical, each plus adds another +1 to the save.

SA—mouth tentacles cause 1d10 points of damage; victim must save vs. poison at -2 or die in six turns (unless healed by magical means). A victim who successfully saves is slowed for 1d6 rounds.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *alter self*, *animate dead*, *bind*, *blink*, *cause disease* (reverse of *cure disease*), *charm person*, *emotion*, *jump*, *improved phantasmal force*, *know alignment*, *meld into stone*, *phantasmal killer* (2/day), *produce flame*, *protection from good*, *resist fire*, *scare*, *stinking cloud*, and *teleport without error*.

Personality: dedicated, demanding.

Usspr'k can tell the PCs the general direction of the baatezu encampment. He's worked this end of the Field of Nettles for only a few decades, but he knows his way around the place. Of course, he demands some form of payment (perhaps help in draining the next lake of blood?) for any favors rendered; Usspr'k isn't in this business to give out charity.





◆ ENCOUNTER 5: ◆ THE CREEPING HORROR ◆

Toward the baatezu end of the Field of Nettles, the heaps of fiendish corpses and the paths through them grow far more orderly (a clue that the PCs are nearing their goal). But the party soon comes across a place where the carcasses have been dissected and the parts set aside in very organized piles. Fact is, a bold traveler can wander down paths that lie between neat mounds of all manner of creatures' limbs and organs.

'Course, if any PC ambles down one of these passages, he's in for a surprise. A baatezu wizard (long since killed in battle) has animated these body parts, training them to attack travelers and invaders. And despite the death of their creator, the pieces continue to fulfill their function admirably.

Ropelike veins reach out to wrap around a body's legs. Clawed hands strangle and tear at those who get tripped up. Spiked legs kick, organs spew bile and acid — all parts are quite diligent in their duty.

Body part (2d20+40): AC 8; MV 6; HD ½; hp 1d4 each; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d2, 1d4, or 1d6 (depending on part); SZ var; ML fanatic (18); Int semi (4); AL LE; XP 15 each.

The body parts are also trained to keep well away from fire. If any PC is smart enough to wave an open flame at the body parts, or even threaten them with a lantern, the pieces withdraw, awaiting their chance to strike out at the intruders.

◆ THE OUTSKIRTS ◆

When the PCs finally make it across the Field of Nettles and reach the baatezu encampment, they find it huge — a good 45 miles across. A handful of lesser baatezu like abishai and hamatula prowl the semipermanent dwellings left behind, moving among the debris of the old campsite. The place is, of course, fairly well ordered. The ground is free of garbage, and the buildings stand in rigid rows off into the distance.

The camp area closest to the Field contains the bunks of the lesser baatezu. The rooms in the buildings are small and dingy, one built atop the next like cells. (The commanders wanted to cram as many battle-ready fiends as they could into as small a space as possible.)

These cramped quarters are mostly emptied of life, but not of possessions. A PC who wants to loot the whole 40-mile stretch of bunks can come up with a good haul, but

the next Baatorian army'll arrive well before he's finished. Besides, most of the booty's just copper and silver coins — far too bulky for the effort required to carry them.

After the packed bunks, the next tract of buildings spans about five miles. They're laid out in a nautilus shape, spiraling ever inward and downward. These dwellings were home to the army's leaders, and are much more opulent (though all display a certain spartan emptiness).

Again, a party bent on looting can find a nice bit of jink. 'Course, first the sods must beat the curses and protections placed on the treasures — and the nicer the prize, the heavier the ward. The DM is encouraged to flesh out the treasures of the dwellings as desired, and to devise suitably fiendish traps.

THE COMMANDER'S ◆ KEEP ◆

Far along the spiral of the nautilus, at the very center of the baatezu encampment, sits a dark mansion that's surrounded by tall, wrought-iron gates. As the PCs approach, gray smoke pours listlessly from the gutted roof, and the walls appear to be crumbling from a fire that must have struck a week or two earlier (set by Marel Talon, the berk from encounter 1). Minor explosions still rock the black manor as magical traps detonate in the heat. Occasionally, a timber collapses, sending up a fresh shower of sparks and smoke.

The decorations on the building are cruel and — to a human's eye — highly deranged. The acts they depict are beyond words, but all involve extremes of pain and brutality. If the PCs turn away and then look at the scenes again, the figures in them appear to have changed their positions slightly.

As the PCs approach the mansion, show the players the picture of the commander's keep on page 6 of Visions of War.

The keep occupies over a mile of territory, but it's divided into nine separate wings, each devoted to a specific purpose. Any PCs who enter a particular wing should be able to figure out what it was used for.

The nine wings of the mansion are devoted to the following ideals: pleasure, pain, life, death, physique, spirit, mind, slave, and strategy. The two wings closest to the front of the building — those of pleasure and pain — took the most damage from the fire. However, the farthest interior wing — the one devoted to strategy — is still charred enough that most of its traps and alarms have been deactivated.

But three spinagons still patrol the wing of strategy. They were set at the task when the pit fiend commander was

still alive, and now that their boss is dead, they've laid claim to the entire keep. 'Course, that means they want to protect the place as if it were their own.

Spinagon (baatezu) (3):

AC 4; MV 6, Fl 18 (C); HD 3+3; hp 19, 14, 11; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d6 (claw/claw/military fork); SA flame spikes, spell-like powers; MR 15%; SZ S (3' tall); ML average (10); Int average (9); AL LE; XP 3,000 each.

SA—while in flight, can launch up to 12 spikes (2/round) that cause 1d3 points of damage and burst into flame upon impact.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *affect normal fires, change self, command, produce flame, scare, and stinking cloud.*

The spinagons attack obvious spellcasters first. One of the fiends uses its flame spikes to draw the attention of the fighters in the party, and the other two direct *produce flame* and *stinking cloud* at the spell-slingers. The three guards realize that they probably can't defeat the PCs, but they try to confuse and wound the sods — perhaps delaying them long enough for reinforcements to arrive (stragglers from the Field, or even the next baatezu army).

THE PLANS

If two of the spinagons are killed, the third realizes that it's got nothing left to lose. It surrenders immediately, placing its life above its loyalty. Besides, its companions can no longer report on its treachery.

If asked, the remaining spinagon — who gives its name as Villark — leads the PCs to the main tactical room, where the pit fiend commander held conferences with its underlings. The room is about 50 feet on each side, with a line of 10 decorated, hidded urns against the back wall. The urns can't be smashed, moved, or peered through — the only way to tell what's inside an urn is to lift its lid.



The battle plans are hidden in the third urn from the left. The other nine urns are trapped. A PC who lifts the lid of a trapped urn must make a successful saving throw vs. paralysis or suffer the effects of a *hold person* spell for 1d4 days. Any sod within five feet of the urn must also make the save or be *held*.

Naturally, Villark tries to get the PCs to open one of the trapped urns. Fact is, the fiend would like nothing more than to get the whole party *held* — that way, it can escape with its life (and perhaps even loot the party).

If forced, Villark does indeed lead the PCs to the urn that contains the plans. They're printed on a rolled-up piece of smooth skin, and they outline the baatezu's plan of attack for the next 100 days of the Blood War. The skin details troop movements and supplies, and important battlefields

are marked in blood-red ink. The scale of these maps is tremendous – indeed, careful study of the maps reveals just how tremendous.

The Field of Nettles appears on the skin, but it's not outlined in red. Fact is, it's just a minor battle, off in the corner. Small arrows and curved lines indicate how the baatezu troops should proceed through the Field. But close study of the plans reveals that the baatezu's true purpose on the Field is not to defeat the tanar'ri, not to lay claim to the ground, but simply to keep the enemy busy for a short while.

The Field of Nettles is nothing more than a feint. The baatezu sacrificed millions of warriors just so they could draw the tanar'ri's attention away from a battlefield of *real* importance – one that's inked in blood more toward the center of the map (the DM can decide the exact site). Thus, the corpses spread across hundreds of miles mean nothing; they were merely a diversion to keep some tanar'ri forces occupied.

Instead of simply coming out and stating the truth about the Field, the DM should describe the plans in such a way as to let the PCs reach the conclusion on their own. That way, the shock should hit 'em like a thunderclap.

◆ WRAPPING UP ◆

Once the PCs have "liberated" the plans, it's an easy hike to the River Styx – the waterway lies just a few miles beyond the baatezu encampment. At this end of the Field, the black waters flow through the Lower Planes from Baator toward the Abyss.

Bobbing next to a pier is a small craft that looks remarkably seaworthy. There's no one in sight, and the Gray Waste stretches out forever ahead of the party. They can take the boat – the river is easier to navigate here – and hope to catch the right currents. The DM can let them sail until they reach a spot where they can hop a portal back to Sigil, or let them flow into other lower-planar adventures first.

If the PCs are reluctant to launch the boat, they might wait for a marraenoloth to come by in a skiff. But the DM should note how long the party waits – after all, another army from Baator will make its way down the river before long, gearing up for the next battle in the Field of Nettles. And the PCs don't want to be caught with stolen plans hidden on their persons.

AFTERMATH

If the PCs hand the plans to Spiral Hal'ought, the aasimar is as good as his word. He happily forks over the agreed-upon payment, and if the PCs regale him with tales of their exploits, he even gives them a bonus for a job well

done. Spiral also offers to provide them with references – plenty of folks in Sigil listen when an aasimar talks.

He then asks the heroes to go after a shipment of "equipment" (in other words, weapons) that got lost on the way to an important client. If the PCs are interested, the DM can throw them directly into the next adventure in this book, "Strange Bedfellows."

If the PCs try to peel Spiral by keeping the plans or giving them to another interested party, the aasimar brings all of his resources to bear in finding and punishing the cross-trading characters. The PCs can expect to have Spiral's agents dog their heels mercilessly, and Spiral himself pulls every string at his disposal to make life in Sigil as miserable as possible for the party.

'Course, no matter what happens to the plans, the baatezu won't like the fact that the PCs stole them out of their camp. If the party let O'ja the barbazzu get away from the city of flames, or let any of the three spinagon guards flee the commander's keep, it won't be long before the baatezu come looking for the PCs. The next Baatorian army will find the plans missing from the urn; they'll put two and two together and realize that the PCs are the culprits.

In any case, with the plans stolen, the baatezu commanders must change their Blood War strategy – no sense going ahead with a plan that might have spread to the tanar'ri. The baatezu armies are huge, so it's no laughing matter to rethink the whole mess. But they'll do it. Thus, the stolen plans will soon become almost worthless, but Spiral doesn't care – he hopes to sell them for a healthy profit long before the buyers realize anything's been changed.

STORY AWARDS

In addition to gaining experience points for overcoming creatures and NPCs in the adventure, the PCs split the following bonus XP for each action performed to the DM's satisfaction:

Saving Marel Talon from the tower of bones: 200 XP.

Destroying the tower of bones: 500.

Saving O'ja from the cambions: 1,000.

Saving petitioners from Usspr'k: 25 each.

Obtaining the battle plans: 500.

Delivering the plans to Spiral: 500.



When dealing with the fiends, one is always reminded of the old adage about looking too long into the Abyss. Of course, in this case, it's looking too long into Baator . . . but that's neither here nor there.

There's a reason I do what I do, and it's with the full cooperation of my superiors. The Blood War's not just about the fiends kicking the life out of each other. If we're not careful, they might come to an . . . understanding. They might pool their resources. And then where would the rest of us be?

Right now, the war's about law and chaos. We want to keep it that way. We good folks can work out our differences peaceably — usually. But it would be far

more . . . difficult

to face a

united

front of

evil. So

we must

do all we can to

make sure the war

remains a struggle between law and chaos. We must

keep the two most powerful armies on the planes at each other's throats, rather than risk having them sweep over the rest of us.

Do I think the baatezu and tanar'ri have stronger armies than we do? Frankly . . . yes. They've fought each other and perfected their violent skills for far longer than we have. Our pursuits tend more toward the cultivation of gentility and goodness, and only a select number of our hosts have devoted themselves to offense. This, I'm afraid, places us at a serious disadvantage.

Thus, I do my part to keep the Blood War on the Lower Planes. If it means that I must deal with creatures I find distasteful, so be it. We all must make sacrifices for the greater good. Mine just happens to be supplying arms for the baatezu, and every once in a while sending recruits their way.

It's the latter type of . . . transaction that scares me the most. Is it not just as reprehensible as what the fiends themselves do?

No, it can't be. Even those who aren't involved must make sacrifices. If I let matters like that impinge on my conscience, then I allow the fiends a victory of their own. Besides, I can't stand the thought of chaos ascendant.

What I do is right, I'm certain.

Isn't it?

— Zalatian XXIII, Trumpet Archon of the Fifth Celestial Brigade

◆ BACKGROUND ◆

"Strange Bedfellows" is an adventure for 4–6 characters of 6th–9th level. It opens the characters' eyes — perhaps for the first time — to morally unsettling actions committed by those who claim to represent the side of good. Through it all, the PCs must struggle to answer the question: Does the end justify the means?

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

I AM NOT
TURNING MY BACK
ON CHAOS.
— ZALATIAN XXIII



A POLICY OF CONTAINMENT+

In all the ages of the Blood War, the fiends have kept mainly to the Lower Planes. Though they've ventured forth into other lands, their primary focus is to seize absolute control of the nether regions. The mid- and upper-planar beings are more than happy to encourage them, for it reduces the chance that the war will spill over, much less end, any time soon. Fact is, many of the neutral- and good-aligned cutters look to prolong the Blood War as much as possible, playing the two fiendish races against each other.

'Course, it's not much of a stretch for the lawful archons to support the orderly baatezu, and for chaotic aasimon to back the free-willed tanar'ri. Though they can't trust the evil berks, the celestials tend to support the ethos most similar to their own — and this allegiance colors the rest of their dealings.

It's said that folks are tainted or glorified by the company they keep. That's never more true than when bargaining with the fiends, who corrupt everything they touch. Even the celestials are not immune.

Witness the case of Zalatian XXIII. In his dealings with the baatezu, he has lost sight of the true meaning of goodness. From his tower of Malachrism (in the second layer of Mount Celestia), the trumpet archon masterminds the transfer of weapons and recruits to Baator. In his quest to keep chaos from gaining power, he's fallen from his noble ideals — and he's starting to lose track of the ends and the means.

Naturally, he and his superiors don't want folks knowing how much aid they give to their race's enemies, so they work through middlemen like Spiral Hal'oight, an aasimar in The Lady's Ward of Sigil. Unfortunately, every step the celestials try to hide is another step that can go wrong. And the whole structure's about to come crashing down.

See, the yugoloths pull the strings of the Blood War, and they don't much like any factor they can't control — like the arrangement between Zalatian and the baatezu. In the chain of delivery from the Upper Planes to the Lower, several links hide Zalatian's presence. The yugoloths hope to cut those links and force the trumpet archon to admit his involvement, or just drive the do-gooder from the business entirely. Either way, the yugoloths end up manipulating the deal — and controlling the sales.

Unfortunately for the archon, his hierarchy isn't so complicated that it can't be followed back to the source. But so far, his involvement's stayed fairly well hidden. 'Course, that's just because no one devious enough had cared to trace it back before. Once the yugoloths decided to take a hand, there was no hiding anything — an archon just doesn't have what it takes to out-guile one of those calculating fiends.

ARCHON AND SON

Zalatian is devoted to his cause, but he's starting to fear that he's not acting as nobly as he ought. His dealings with the fiends have caused him to question his essential goodness and wonder whether he deserves the station he currently enjoys as a trumpet archon. And as is the case with some folks, instead of examining himself more closely, he's taking his actions to the extreme. He hopes to gloss over his worries by immersing himself in his work, in effect declaring that because he's involved in the business, it *must* be good. He won't take news of the yugoloths' involvement very well. What he *does* about it really depends on how the information's presented to him.

Though the two are many layers removed, Zalatian works through Spiral Hal'oight to move arms and warriors to the baatezu. It's Spiral who does the actual day-to-day "dirty work" of tracking shipments, meeting with fiends, hiring cargo guards, and so on. But Zalatian is also the smooth aasimar's father. Spiral doesn't know it — fact is, the arms merchant doesn't even know that Zalatian exists. Spiral deals only with his immediate high-ups, and he has no idea that the rulers of the trading game are archons.

That's how Zalatian likes it. The trumpet archon wants to keep his presence secret, even from his own son. 'Course, his relationship with Spiral is one of the main reasons that the aasimar was recruited as a middleman in the first place. But with the yugoloths sticking their snouts into everything, the dark of the matter probably won't stay hidden for long.

Zalatian XXIII (archon — trumpet): AC -3; MV 12, FI 21 (B); HD 11; hp 74; THACO 11; #AT 2; Dmg 1d10+3/1d10+3 (*two-handed sword* +3); SA spell-like powers, trumpet, spell use; SD menacing aura, +3 or better weapons to hit; MR 40%; SZ L (7' tall); ML fanatic (18); Int exceptional (15); AL LG.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *continual light*, *detect evil*, *infravision*, *protection from evil* 10' radius (always active), *teleport without error*, and *tongues* (always active).

SA—victim who hears a blast from his silver trumpet must save vs. spell or be paralyzed for 1d4 rounds.

SA—can cast spells from all priest spheres at the 17th level of ability (once per round, at will).

SD—foes must save vs. spell at -3 or suffer a -2 penalty to all attack rolls made against Zalatian (aura vanishes once Zalatian is struck by a foe).

Personality: introspective, fanatic.

Special Equipment: silver trumpet that transforms into a silver *two-handed sword* +3 (forged on Mount Celestia), but becomes a lump of lead in anyone else's hands.

For complete statistics for Spiral Hal'ought, as well as more information about his appearance and his mansion, please refer to "The Field of Nettles," earlier in this book.

THE ADVENTURE'S FLOW

Spiral seeks out the PCs to have them undertake a little investigative work for him. It seems that some of his arms shipments to various parties have gone astray, and he wants to know exactly where the weapons are now.

If the PCs agree, Spiral sends them to Hopeless (a gate-town on the Outlands), where they meet his agent, Mealle the Just. She tries to convince the party to ride out with the next shipment of arms due to leave Hopeless, in disguise as Spiral's regular cargo guards.

If the PCs go along, they're beset by brigands soon after leaving town. But the thieves are really *polymorphed* yugoloths looking to break up the archon's delivery.



ring. If the PCs beat the brigands, they can find the fiends' secret base, where an ultroloth gives the party an ominous message to deliver to Zalatian. (If the PCs lose the fight, the brigands carry them back to Hopeless, where the ultroloth delivers the same message.)

When the PCs return to Spiral with the news, they follow a chain of command back to the person who directs the shipments — Zalatian XXIII. The trumpet archon is more than a little dismayed that his plan was discovered so easily. Torn by conflicting desires, he pleads with the PCs to advise him on how best to deal with the treacherous yugoloths.

The PCs literally hold Zalatian's future in their hands — as well as that of Spiral Hal'oight and the entire trading ring. Will they scrag the cross-trading celestials in the name of truth and justice? Or will they decide that a good end is worth any means?



THE FACTIONS

In this adventure, it's not necessary for any of the player characters to belong to factions. But if any factioneer PCs go looking for help from their headquarters in Sigil, they get the following advice:

- THE ATHAR, BELIEVERS OF THE SOURCE, BETAK CABAL, DUSTMEN, and FREE LEAGUE: None of these groups care much about the activities of an arms dealer.
- THE DOOMGUARD: No matter how the whole adventure turns out, it's sure to further the cause of entropy and decay. If the PC can help it along, great. If not — well, at least he tried.
- THE FATED: If a shipment of powerful weapons is up for grabs, the PC should try to find it — and keep it. Obviously, Spiral's not strong enough to hold onto his goods, so he doesn't deserve to have them back.
- THE FRATERNITY OF ORDER, HARMONIUM, and MERCYKILLERS: Anyone who makes secret deals with the fiends must be punished. First, the PC should track down and confiscate the missing goods before they fall into the wrong hands. And then Spiral himself must be brought to justice.
- THE REVOLUTIONARY LEAGUE: Naturally, they're delighted to uncover secrets that could embarrass bloods in power. If the faction catches a hint of the dark of the deal — that a noble aasimar and shining archon are running arms to fiends — they'll encourage the PC to check it out and spread the chant all over town.
- THE SIGN OF ONE: Because each Signer believes himself to be the center of the multiverse, a PC should make up his own mind without asking around for advice.

THE SOCIETY OF SENSATION: The trip could be good for a laugh — or a cry. Who can say what exotic experiences might await in Hopeless?

THE TRANSCENDENT ORDER: Faction members act by instinct, not analysis. Go already.

THE XADISTECTS: A body can go if it pleases him, and stay if it pleases him. Or both. Or neither. (Though there's great temptation to go along and make sure that the arms shipment stays lost — what happy chaos!)

◆ I+ BEGINS ◆

The opening of the adventure depends on whether the PCs have already dealt with Spiral Hal'oight (in "The Field of Nettles"), or if they've never met him before.

IF THE PCs HAVE WORKED FOR SPIRAL:

Pogewdor (PI/δ githzerai/0-level/CN), one of the aasimar's charming couriers, comes looking for the PCs (tracking them down through friends or faction headquarters in Sigil). Basically, the githzerai takes the place of the trio of agents who seek out the PCs in "The Field of Nettles." He fulfills the same function: He asks the party to accompany him back to Spiral's case in The Lady's Ward.

Note that the "Aftermath" section of "The Field of Nettles" gives the DM a chance to launch directly into "Strange Bedfellows." If the PCs return the baatezu plans to Spiral and want to go on another adventure right away, the DM doesn't need to worry about getting them to the mansion.

IF THE PCs HAVEN'T MET SPIRAL:

From the streets of Sigil comes a warning that something big's about to go down. Chant says that a well-connected blood — several factots are mentioned, as is the Lady of Pain herself — finally bit off more than he could chew, and he's likely to get the rope. Apparently, it's all due to a shipment of rare, perishable upper-planar spices that's gone missing.

Wherever the PCs go in Sigil, they can't help but hear talk of the matter. And it seems that someone's got his eye on them, too — they're approached by the courier Pogewdor. He flatters their prowess and begs them to pay a call upon his master, an aasimar merchant in The Lady's Ward. He needs to hire a few cutters to sniff out a few crates of "goods" that never reached their destination. If the PCs accept, Pogewdor escorts them back to Spiral's opulent home.

GETTING TO SPIRAL

No matter how the adventure begins, the DM should adapt the opening sections of "The Field of Nettles." Those pages describe the experience of approaching Spiral's mansion, shedding weapons and magic as a sign of trust, and being whisked into the presence of the aasimar merchant himself.

◆ MISSING CARGO ◆

Instead of having to cool their heels until Spiral's ready to see them, the PCs find that the large ivory doors to the inner sanctum stand wide open. Spiral has no other customers; he's prepared to talk to the PCs immediately. This must mean that something big has happened.

Annom (Pl/♂ human/F9/LN) ushers the PCs into Spiral's darkened chamber and then leaves, closing the doors behind him. The light centered on Spiral's desk reveals nothing for a moment, but the PCs know that the aasimar sits in the chair behind the desk — they can hear him sigh.

Spiral Hal'ought leans forward, allowing the light to catch his face. "I asked you here because you're among the best. You're a tenacious pack of cutters, and have proven yourselves time and again. I just hope my faith in you is well placed."

"I've been dealing in . . . certain kinds of delicate goods for some time now. My record has always been spotless. But for the first time in over fifty years, I've accidentally let a shipment go . . . astray. Naturally, it pains me to know that valued clients didn't receive what they paid for. I want you to track down the goods and find out the reason for the trouble."

The terms of service are the same as those in "The Field of Nettles": 5–10,000 in gold, a magical item, or a favor that's worth more than jink. Spiral won't tell the PCs where to begin their search until they've accepted his offer and settled on a specific payment.

Once they do, he reveals that the party must travel to Hopeless, the Outlands gate-town that leads to the Gray Waste. The shipment in question was last seen on a caravan heading out of Hopeless, but the crew vanished before reaching the final destination. Once the PCs get to Hopeless, they should look up a female tiefling called Mealle the Just, Spiral's agent in that town.

If the PCs have worked with Spiral before, they probably know that the missing shipment involved weapons. But if they're new to his type of business, they might demand to know exactly what they're supposed to track down. At first, Spiral sticks to the story about rare celestial spices, but under pressure, he admits — without coming right out and saying "weapons" — that the cargo is a bit more dangerous than Elysian pepper powder.

If the PCs ask who the goods were intended for, Spiral again pauses for a moment, reflecting. After a time, he admits that the clients are baatezu. "But everyone else makes a profit from the Blood War, so why shouldn't I? Besides, a

few . . . of the kinds of things I provide aren't going to tip the fighting one way or the other, in the long run."

If the PCs agree to chase down the cargo, Spiral is almost frighteningly eager to help them reach Hopeless. He drafts a letter of introduction, provides the party with a pouch containing 1,000 gp (for expenses), and gives them a list of known portals that let out near the town. If the party desires, he even provides them with an escort to the portal of their choice.

THE REAL CHANT: Spiral's practically desperate at this point. He doesn't want word of his breach of professional etiquette to get around, he doesn't want the baatezu breathing down his neck about the "delayed" shipment, and he doesn't want to lose the money he's owed — probably that more than anything.

SLEEPING THE BLINDS: If the PCs try to back out after hearing the specifics of the job, Spiral's more than a little incensed. The honey-tongued aasimar first tries to lure them with sweet words, even upping the price he's willing to pay. If necessary, he moves on to threats, warning that the PCs' reputation in Sigil would suffer if word of their faithlessness were to "leak out."

◆ HOPELESS ◆

No matter which portal the PCs use, they come out just a few hours' walk from Hopeless. As they near the town, the Outlands' flat ground grows rough and hilly, and the air becomes noticeably cold and stale.

Hopeless is mostly below ground level, with only the entrance and a few of the buildings on the surface. What's more, a hundred-foot-tall wall of gray stone completely encircles the pit in which the town sits. The only break in the wall is a gate carved in the shape of a screaming human face; the PCs must walk through the open mouth in order to enter Hopeless.

As the PCs approach Hopeless, show the players the picture of the town on page 7 of Visions of War.

From the entrance, a single long road gradually spirals down into a deep pit, ending in a courtyard at the bottom (where sits a well of black ooze, the gate to the Gray Waste). To get anywhere in town, a body's just got to wind his way up or down the spiral until he finds what he's looking for.

The gray burg's home to about 20,000 of the most depressed (and depressing) sods this side of a mortuary, all ruled by a deranged, masked female called Thingol the Mocking. A pack of seven cruel beholders keeps the peace,



IT'S NOTHING, REALLY —
JUST SPICES.

VERY HOT SPICES.

— SPIRAL HAL'OUGH+
EXPLAINING THE
"DELICATE" NATURE
OF HIS CARGO



and the good folks of the Chapterhouse of the Sisterhood offer aid and healing to the dreary (and resentful) townsfolk. Taverns include *The Defenestrated Paladin* (rowdy), *The Open Tomb* (quiet), and *The Castle of Bone* (chatty).

In the area of town beyond the third ring of the spiral, bright or contrasting colors are forbidden. The natives are allowed (and encouraged) to take action against berks who have clothes or items too colorful for sensitive eyes. Most townsfolk wear only black or gray so as not to stir up trouble. The dismal nature of the burg should be clear to observant PCs (the DM can allow Wisdom checks at +2 to see if the characters notice).

If the PCs waltz too far into Hopeless without discarding or concealing colored items, they're attacked by a mob of villagers. The natives pelt them with sticky black mud and refuse from farm animals until the offending colors are covered. The PCs are in no real danger, but they can fight back — though the red sight of spilled blood's likely to get the rest of the populace riled.

If a melee does ensue, Thingol's beholder servants float by to investigate and clear off the streets. They try to quiet the disturbance with any means at their disposal, and most of the townsfolk know that when these creatures darken the sky, it's best to move on, and that right quick.

THE REAL CHANT: A rough map of Hopeless appears

below. For more information on the town, refer to the PLANESCAPE accessory *A Player's Primer to the Outlands*.

Villager (100): AC 10 (none); MV 12; HD 1; hp 5 each; THACO 20; #AT 2; Dmg 1d2/1d2 (fists); SZ M (5' tall); ML average (8); Int average (9); AL N(E).

Beholder (7): AC 0 (body), 2 (eyestalk), or 7 (eye); MV Fl 3 (B); HD 51 hp each (34 in body, 17 in central eye); THACO 9; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (bite); SA magic; SD antimagic ray; SZ M (6' diameter); ML fanatic (18); Int exceptional (16); AL LE; XP 14,000 each.

SA—10 small eyestalks (8 hp each) can produce the following spell-like effects at will: *charm person*, *charm monster*, *sleep* (one target), *telekinesis* (250-lb. weight), *flesh to stone* (30-yd. range), *disintegrate* (20-yd. range), *fear*, *slow* (single target), *cause serious wounds* (50-yd. range), and *death* (one target, 40-yd. range).

SD—central eye can produce an antimagic ray (140-yd. range, 90-degree arc in front of beholder) that prevents the use of any magic (including that of other eyestalks) in the area.



SPIRAL'S AGENT

Mealle the Just (Pl/♀ tiefling/M5/Bleak Cabal/N) has a kip in the third ring of the spiral road, close to *The Open Tomb*. She's a dark-haired tiefling, with pointed features and slanting eyebrows that mark her as something both more and less than human. Another hint to her shady ancestry: a pair of bumps under the skin on her forehead that look suspiciously like horns getting ready to bud.

Most villagers can direct the PCs to Mealle's dwelling (which doubles as her place of business), but few sods care about helping anyone else. However, if the PCs manage to make a resident feel an emotion other than sadness or anger, they've made a friend – one who willingly points the way to Mealle.

The tiefling's kip is a two-story building made of gray, weathered wood, with a pair of blackened swords crossed above the doorway. Inside, a professional-looking office awaits, and a burly man named Irri (Pl/♂ human/F8/Bleak Cabal/N) sits behind the desk, acting as Mealle's secretary and personal valet.

After a brief wait, Irri takes the PCs into Mealle's gray, sparsely decorated office. The tiefling's busy poring through records of past shipments, but she always has time for cutters sent by Spiral. 'Course, the PCs must first prove their story by showing her Spiral's letter of introduction; she passes over it with a magical jewel to make sure it hasn't been forged. When she's satisfied that it's the genuine article, she relaxes somewhat, and briefs the party on the situation.

"I juggle caravans for Spiral all the time," she says, rubbing her chin. "Last one to leave Hopeless vanished without a trace 'bout a week ago. It was bound for a secret gate in the mountains nearby. But it didn't get there, and we couldn't find so much as a scrap of cloth or drop of blood to tell us what happened."

The tiefling looks your group over, "I guess Spiral hopes you berks can find more. We've got another shipment just waiting to be sent on its way, but it's going nowhere 'til we get to the bottom of this."

Mealle can provide the PCs with details of the missing caravan's route, and the party can poke around in the hills around Hopeless for leads.

However, if they ask about posing as cargo guards and riding along with the next shipment, the tiefling's glad to provide horses and wagons. The party must load up nine heavy crates that smell like pepper (each box is marked "Spices") from a dingy warehouse on the fourth spiral of the road. Mealle might even be able to find a few expendable berks to make it look like a full train, and thus a more tempting target (a mercenary band of hungry 4th-level fighters currently bunks at *The Defenestrated Paladin*).

If, by this point in the adventure, the PCs still don't realize

that Spiral's shipping weapons, the truth probably won't stay hidden for long. The heroes might want to unload the crates and fill them up with junk (in case they're attacked after leaving town). Or they might demand that Mealle show them what's in the boxes, or just take a peek on the sly. In any case, if the crates are opened, they're revealed to contain gleaming swords, spears, axes, maces, arrows, and so on – all apparently perfect weapons with the sparkle of upper-planar craftsmanship.

SHIPPING THE BLINDS: The party might agree to look for the missing caravan, then simply leave town, kill some time in a cheap bubblehouse somewhere, and return to Mealle and report failure. If they do this, the adventure's effectively over for them. Later, in Sigil, they hear of Spiral's gruesome demise and a related scandal that involved both archons and fiends (see "Wrapping Up").

If the PCs take the weapons and sell them on the side, the deal might net them a bag of junk, but it also earns them no less than three different enemies. Spiral will be mad that the heroes tried to cheat him (the aasimar has spies everywhere and eventually learns of the party's cross-trading). The baatezu'll be mad that they didn't get their promised shipment. And the berks who buy the goods soon come back for the PCs' heads – the weapons are *curled* (see "The Courier," page 34, for details).

◆ THE AMBUSH ◆

Eventually, the PCs venture out into the hills around Hopeless, either looking for a trace of the missing caravan or riding guard on the new shipment. The land around the town is gray, hard, and hilly. A few jagged ravines mark the territory, and mountains rise off in the distance. A faint path diverges from the main road and leads toward the hazy crags. (See the DM's map on page 32.)

The foothills to the mountains rise up rather abruptly, with rocky bluffs thrusting themselves into the sky like accusing fingers. The outcroppings rise higher and higher above the trail, looking like a perfect place to stage an ambush.

If the PCs send ahead a scout, they discover that an ambush is precisely what awaits them – a band of a dozen or more brigands lurks atop the outcroppings. But it seems that the berks aren't very good at keeping themselves concealed. Any PC with skills related to tracking, stealth, or wilderness can spot the ambushers with no difficulty.

Unfortunately for the party, that's exactly what the brigands want. The robbers appear to be a motley mix of humans, demihumans, and tieflings, but they're actually yugoloths – specifically, mezzoloths – that have changed their features using their *alter self* ability. The mezzoloths want to convey an image of ineptitude, though

not total incompetence.



Disguised mezzoloth (yugoloth) (15): AC 7 [-1]; MV 12 [15]; HD 3 [10+20]; hp 18 each [72 each]; THACO 18 [11]; #AT 1 [2]; Dmg 1d8 (axe) [1d6+6/1d6+6 (claw/claw, Str)]; SA nil [spell-like powers]; SD nil [+2 or better weapons to hit, *infravision* 120', immunities]; MR nil [50%]; SZ M (6' tall) [7' tall]; ML unsteady (6) [*elite* (13)]; Int low (7); AL NE; XP 120 each [21,000 each].

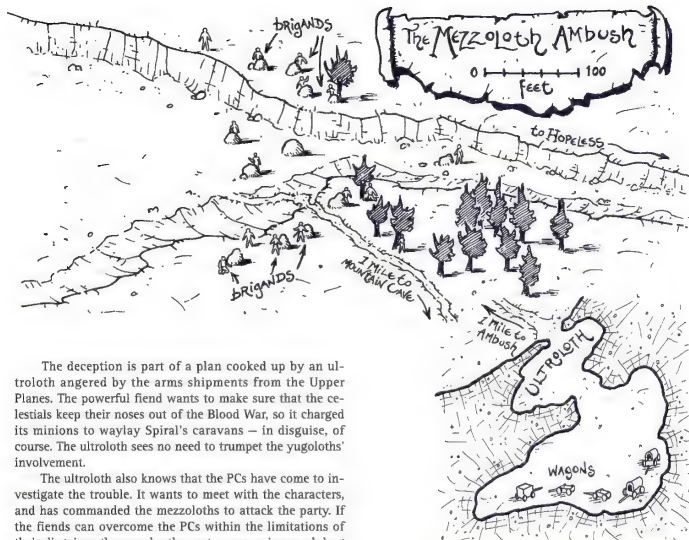
Notes: In the statistics above, the information before the brackets indicates the mezzoloths' apparent abilities. The information within the brackets represents the fiends' true

abilities. A few statistics are the same in both cases. If any mezzoloth is reduced below its apparent 18 hit points, it feigns its own death until the PCs are out of sight.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *alter self*, *animate dead*, *burning hands*, *cause disease* (reverse of *cure disease*), *cause serious wounds* (reverse of *cure serious wounds*), *charm person*, *cloudkill* (1/day), *darkness* 15' radius, *detect invisibility* (always active), *detect magic*, *dispel magic* (2/day), *flame strike* (1/day), *gate* (1d4 mezzoloths or 1d2 hydroloths; 40% chance; 1/day), *hold person*, *improved phantasmal force*, *mirror image*, *produce flame*, *sleep*, *trip*, and *teleport without error*.

SD—immune to paralysis, *charm* spells, and *suggestion* spells; normal damage from cold.





The deception is part of a plan cooked up by an ultroloth angered by the arms shipments from the Upper Planes. The powerful fiend wants to make sure that the celestials keep their noses out of the Blood War, so it charged its minions to waylay Spiral's caravans — in disguise, of course. The ultroloth sees no need to trumpet the yugoloths' involvement.

The ultroloth also knows that the PCs have come to investigate the trouble. It wants to meet with the characters, and has commanded the mezzoloths to attack the party. If the fiends can overcome the PCs within the limitations of their disguises, they render the party unconscious and drag them back to Hopeless, where the ultroloth has chartered a house. The PCs are locked in a room upstairs, and when they wake up they find that they still have all of their equipment. The party is left to its own devices, but the only exit from the room leads through a large chamber where the ultroloth awaits.

If the PCs beat the "brigands," the mezzoloths feign death until the party's out of sight, then assume their true forms. If the PCs snoop around, they find that the brigands have left a clear trail through the mountains to their secret base of operations. (The DM can even have one disguised mezzoloth flee from combat and run back to the base, allowing the party to chase it.)

The trail leads to a small cavern, where the ultroloth waits for the party. At the back of the cavern is the entrance to another, much larger cave, in which lie dozens of crates and boxes stolen from Spiral's caravans.

SLIPPING THE BLINDS: No matter how the battle unfolds, the PCs might employ *true seeing* or similar means and discover that the brigands are really yugoloths. If the mezzoloths are aware that the jig is up, they drop their disguises and use whatever powers are necessary to subdue the PCs and drag them before the ultroloth.

◆ THE ULTROLOTH ◆

Regardless of whether the PCs encounter the ultroloth in the cavern or in the house, at first the fiend appears to be a lifeless statue — motionless, its spare frame wrapped in a voluminous black cloak. After a moment, it turns to face the party, seeming to spin more than move, its ebony eyes boring into all PCs at once.

The cavern/room then seems to rotate around the yugoloth, and the heroes get the sensation that they're spinning around the fiend, rather than simply watching the creature turn. The effect is quite disorientating, and the PCs suffer a -2 penalty to any attack rolls or Dexterity checks made during the encounter.

If the PCs are in the house, one wall of the room features a shimmering image of a large cave that contains crates just like the ones used by Spiral Hal'ought's caravans. (The ultroloth was using magical means to check up on its stolen hoard.) If the PCs are in the cavern, they easily make out the entrance to the larger cave that holds the same cargo.

After a moment, the ultroloth speaks. Its voice is like the buzzing of strange bees in a hive and the crash of acidic waves on a sulfurous shore.

"Tell the archon that his involvement in this smuggling scheme will come to an end. We will suffer no more interference from his ilk; the war progresses nicely without the meddling of the celestials.

"If the amateur wishes to continue supplying arms, he can deliver them to us, here. We will then decide the eventual disposition of the weapons."

The PCs might think that the ultroloth is speaking about Spiral Hal'ought. If they point out that Spiral's an aasimar, not an archon, the fiend shoots them a withering glare.

"When we say archon, we mean archon. That fanflesh archon-child aasimar is not the source of the river, nor is he the end. He is merely a pebble in the stream, and of no consequence to us."

The ultroloth pauses, then speaks again in more measured tones. "Tell the archon that we have his weapons. If we do not hear from him within seven days, we will send the crates on to the baatezu. Though that is what he intended all along, warn him that his deal will have results far beyond any he foresaw — or desired.

"That is all."

When it has finished delivering its speech, the ultroloth dismisses the PCs merely by turning its back on them. The party probably has no idea what the fiend was talking about, but it doesn't answer further questions or respond to anything they say or do. (The fiend's reference to unwanted results means that the most recently shipped weapons are cursed and will bring the baatezu great woe. Neither Spiral nor Zalatan are aware of this.)

If any PCs are stupid enough to attack the ultroloth, it first summons its mezzoloth retainers (the brigands) to kill the impudent fools. If the mezzoloths can't handle the job, the ultroloth takes more drastic measures (see "Slipping the Blinds," below). The fiend makes sure to leave at least one PC alive to take the warning back to the archon, though it ceases all hostilities if the heroes do likewise.

Utroloth (yugoloth): AC -8; MV 15, Fl 15 (C), Sw 15; HD 13+26; hp 112; THACO 7 (3 with Str); #AT 2; Dmg 1d12/1d12 (hand strikes); SA fascination gaze, spell-like powers; SD infravision 240', never surprised, +3 or better weapons to hit; MR 60%; SZ M (6'1/2' tall); ML fanatic (18); Int supra-genius (19); AL NE; XP 26,000.

Notes: The ultroloth has Strength 21 (+4, +9).

SA—victim who meets the ultroloth's gaze must save vs. spell or stop as if held.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *airwalk*, *alter self*, *animate dead*, *animate object*, *bind*, *call lightning*, *cause disease* (reverse of cure disease), *charm person*, *color spray* (7/day), *control winds*, *detect invisibility/lie/magic/poison/crying* (always active), *ESP*, *fear*, *fire storm* (1/day), *gate* (any weaker yugoloth; 100% chance; 1/day per type), *geas*, *improved phantasmal force*, *know alignment* (always

active), *mass suggestion* (1/day), *passwall*, *pass without trace* (always active), *produce flame*, *read magic* (always active), *shout*, *solid fog*, *symbol* (any type, 1/day), *teleport without error*, and *wall of fire*.

SLEEPING THE BLINDS: The ultroloth won't let the heroes gain access to Spiral's stolen crates of weapons. If the PCs make the slightest move toward checking out the stored cargo, what happens depends on whether the group is in the house or in the cavern.

If they're in the house, the ultroloth simply waves its hand and the image of the crates disappears. The PCs have no idea how to find the stolen cargo they saw.

If they're in the cavern, the fiend uses any of the following methods to drive the PCs back out into the mountains:

- ◆ It summons the mezzoloths to fight the party.
- ◆ It *gates* in one each of the following yugoloths: arcanaloth, dergholoth, hydroloth, mezzoloth, nycaloth, pisciloth, and yagnoloth.
- ◆ It uses *animate object*, *fear*, *control winds*, or *mass suggestion* to drive the PCs away.
- ◆ It casts *solid fog* or *wall of fire* to block the entrance to the larger cavern.
- ◆ It uses any power at its command to kill the PCs, one by one, until the survivors take the hint.



◆ RETURN TO HOPELESS ◆

After leaving the ultroloth's presence, the PCs can try to poke around in the mountains outside of Hopeless to find the stolen weapons. But unless they have a powerful magical digging tool — and know the exact place to dig to break into the cargo cavern — they come up empty-handed.

Eventually, they should return to Mealle and report what happened. If the PCs lost any crates of weapons, the tiefling is extremely displeased — even more so once she hears their incredible-sounding story.

"Curse those yugoloths to the Abyss! Why're they sticking their foul noses into our business? And all that pap about an archon — I think you'd better take this news back to Spiral."

If the PCs ask around Hopeless about yugoloth activity in the hills, they get only blank stares. Most of the folks in town don't care what happens outside of their own miserable lives. Even if the PCs managed to make a few friends in town, the sods know nothing worthwhile.

If the heroes encountered the ultroloth in the house,

they might try to discover more about the structure. All they can learn for sure is that the shoddy kip's located in the fourth ring of the spiral road, and the owner's been dead for years. Apparently, the berk's woes made him so barmy that he went on a killing spree. When the neighbors eventually noticed the stench of decay, Thingol's thugs investigated and found that the kip was a charnel house. Ever since, no one's wanted to live there, shunning it as a place more evil than even the bounds of Hopeless should permit.

If the PCs return to the house, they discover that it's entirely empty, and seems as if it's stood that way for years. The dust on the floor is undisturbed and at least an inch thick. There's no sign that anyone, including the PCs, set foot in the house since the bodies were found a decade ago.

◆ BACK + ⊕ SIGIL ◆

When the PCs are ready to report back to Spiral, Mealle directs them to a gate that drops them in the city's Lower Ward. (Personally, she's glad to let the PCs take the chant to the aasimar — that way, any recriminations will fall on *their* heads, not hers.)

When the PCs return to Spiral's place in The Lady's Ward, Annom immediately shows them to the sitting room just outside the inner sanctum. Within moments, Spiral dismisses his current client — a nervous-looking king dressed in a style that's all the rage on one of the prime-material worlds — and beckons the party in.

The aasimar actually moves from behind his desk to question the PCs on the details of what they've found. His beautiful face betrays his eagerness, but a jewel hanging around his neck can detect lie as per the spell. 'Course, the gem can't pick up on half-truths or untold stories, so the PCs can leave out specifics if they choose.

As the characters explain what happened, Spiral's brow furrows with thought. He guesses that the yugoloths got involved because, as mercenaries in the Blood War, they want to eliminate the competition. Spiral honestly can't think of how any archon might be involved, but he does have an idea who might know:

"Some of the folks who supply my . . . shipments have contacts on Mount Celestia. They might know of any archons with a vested interest in the matter. In fact, one of the couriers from that plane — a priest named Braus, I think — is due here in the next day or two. You're welcome to return then to meet him."

If the PCs seem peery about meeting Braus, Spiral points out that they haven't yet fulfilled the conditions of

their employment. Sure, they might have found out who took the missing cargo, but the puzzle's still unfinished. The aasimar demands that the heroes learn how the archons fit into the business — or if the ultroloth was just peeling them.

◆ THE COURIER ◆

If the PCs return to Spiral's the following day, the courier shows up about an hour after they do. His name is Braus (Pl/d half-elf/P9/Fraternity of Order/LG), a priest of Mitra, and he's been running errands for cutters on the Upper Planes for years. Most of his contacts are just well-to-do bashers who've got better things to do with their time than run all over the planes, but a few of his clients are well placed in the celestial hierarchy.

Braus is slender, graceful, and soft-spoken (though not nearly as smooth as Spiral himself). What's more, the priest is quite friendly and likeable, despite the fact that he's rigid in his faith. Braus has a natural charisma that's hard to deny, and it makes his attitude easier to bear.

Spiral introduces Braus to the party, concludes his business with the courier, and allows the group free rein in his lavishly decorated mansion. Braus prefers to leave and walk the streets of Sigil — he's not stupid enough to trust Spiral completely. "The walls have ears," he warns.

Oddly, Braus is strangely open about his employers. Though he's in a business

that calls for discretion, he respects the sharing of truth. However, he's not willing to give out information for free;

he wants a fair and even trade. If the PCs can reveal something useful about the fiends — perhaps confirm the authenticity of the recently uncovered baatezu battle plans (as detailed in "The Field of Nettles") — he gives them the following chant:

"Spiral was greatly worried about the stolen shipments of weapons — I assume you knew the nature of the goods. But, in truth, his reputation would have been wrecked anyway."

"You see, the last few crates of arms were almost entirely made up of cursed weapons. Spiral thinks himself a real player, a mover and shaker, but in truth, he's just a



THA+ YUGLOTH+H
MIGHT+ HAVE BEEN LYING,
YOU KNOW,
THA+'S WHA+ THEY DO.

— MEALLE +HE JUST+



pawn to the high-ups. They saw that the hantezu were growing too powerful, too quickly—in part due to their own shipments.

"So my contacts acted to quash that power a bit. The cursed weapons are designed so that any fiend who sees them will crave them, will do anything to possess them. My high-ups are fairly sure that the curse works only on the lower orders of fiends, though it may affect dim-witted mortals as well. Still, the infighting might be enough to destroy a lower planar army or two."

If the PCs note that throwing Spiral away is hardly the act of a group of celestial beings, Braus remarks coldly that Spiral's part of neither law nor good. He may be an aasimar, but he lives only for his own personal wealth. It may seem harsh to dispose of a faithful servant, but the betrayal serves the greater cause. The good of a single individual hardly compares to that of the multiverse, especially when the individual is as self-centered a berk as Spiral.

If the PCs tell Braus about their meeting with the utroloth, the priest agrees to introduce them to the cutter at the top of the celestial supply ring. But first he needs to know the whole story—the PCs must spill every detail of their trip, holding nothing back. (Braus asks them to submit to a *detect lie* spell to confirm their tale.)

He also insists that the PCs confess any secrets that might prove useful to the celestials in the long run, whether or not they relate to the matter at hand. Braus is interested in the dark of many subjects, and if the party has knowledge that's best kept hidden, now's the time to reveal it.

Finally, Braus asks that the party make a donation to Mitra's temple of at least 2,000 gp. Conveniently, the deity has no temple in Sigil, so the PCs must either find one elsewhere (DM's discretion) or hand the jink over to Braus. The priest truly intends to use the gold for the betterment of the temple, but his request for money might seem hypocritical—especially after condemning Spiral for being greedy.

TO THE MOUNT

Braus doesn't feel like he's betraying any confidences by taking the PCs to his high-up, Zalatian XXIII. If what the party says is true, the yugoloths know of Zalatian's involvement, and it won't be much longer until just about everyone knows. Besides, the celestials as a whole will profit from the party's secrets.

The DM, of course, has the final say on whether the PCs have given Braus secrets worth the cost. If they have, the priest escorts them to a portal hidden behind a bureaucrat's office in the Clerk's Ward. Pulling a small platinum-covered stone from his pouch, he opens the portal and leads the party into the fields of Mount Celestia's second layer, Mercuria. As the PCs breathe in the rarified air of the Mount, their cares seem to seep away into the sky.

Braus strikes out for the town of Goldfire, which sits majestically in the distance. The heroes find the trip quite

pleasant and serene. As they near the town, though, Braus veers off toward a tall marble tower a few miles away.

◆ CELESTIAL ANGST ◆

As the PCs draw closer to the circular tower, they can see a single walkway around its top (at least 200 feet high), though no doors or windows mar the structure's perfectly white surface.

Once the group reaches the base of the tower, Braus tilts his head back and calls out.

"My lord, it is I, Braus, with servants of your son! Call us up, for we have much of moment to discuss!"

The fact that Braus refers to Spiral Hal'oight as Zalatian's son should come as some surprise to the PCs—they've never had any reason to suspect a connection. But there's no time to question Braus: Almost immediately, a sensation of bliss surrounds the visitors, and all begin to rise into the air. (If any PCs don't wish to go, they can try to save vs. spell to remain on the ground, but those who stay have no say in the conclusion of the adventure.)

Braus and the PCs float to the walkway at the top of the tower, where a seven-foot-tall, silver-haired archon awaits. He looks a bit like a very fair, winged elf, though the resemblance between his facial features and Spiral's are unmistakable. (The DM can let the PCs make Wisdom checks at +3 to notice the similarity.) The archon wears a gleaming silver collar and breastplate, and holds a silver trumpet at his side.

When the PCs see Zalatian, show the players the picture of the trumpet archon on page 8 of *Visions of War*.

Braus bows before Zalatian, then turns to the party.

"Allow me to introduce to you Zalatian XXIII, Commander of the Fifth Celestial Brigade, Lord of the Western Trumpets, Regent of the Lesser Slopes." Braus then turns to the archon. "My lord, may I withdraw below?"

Zalatian nods assent, and Braus disappears in a twinkling cloud of tiny stars. The priest seems extremely pleased by the experience.

The archon turns toward your group. "Well," he says, in a voice as glorious as church bells, "to what do I owe this honor? If my son is involved, this is surely not a social visit."

Zalatian waits for the PCs to answer, and he draws them out for greater detail at every turn. The archon listens calmly, though his silver eyes swell with storms at any mention of yugoloths. As the PCs conclude their story—and especially if they deliver the message from the utroloth—Zalatian's gaze turns inward. Emotions play across his face, rage becoming anguish, anguish becoming resolve.



"So," murmurs Zalatian, as if he's forgotten your presence, "I am caught by the very fiends I hoped to work against. . . neatly trapped, like a fly in amber. I seem to have three choices.

I can bow to the yugoloths. The desires in this matter I can send them the arms, let them control the distribution. But this grants the fiends access to my spirit — a great personal sacrifice.

I can cease making shipments altogether. But then the archons lose what little influence we have in the Blood War . . . unless there are others, unknown to me, who work toward the same end.

"Or I can ignore the ultroloth's wishes, and continue to send and as I will. But who can say where that road might lead.

The archon turns suddenly to face you. "Advise me! I cannot see my way through this dilemma. Perhaps a fresh perspective can cut through the cobwebs that tangle my mind.

Zalatian gazes beseechingly at the PCs, waiting for a response. If asked, he refuses to send celestials to simply kill the yugoloths — he's unwilling to start a chain reaction of murder and vengeance that would surely claim many innocent and upper-planar lives in the process.

THE DECISION

The PCs must decide the fate of the archon's involvement in the Blood War. Zalatian will abide by whatever decision they make, for he is torn between too many conflicting loyalties.

If the PCs tell Zalatian to let the yugoloths control where his shipments end up, the archon seems unhappy, but accepts the party's decision.

He asks them to return to Hopeless, seek out the ultroloth, and inform the fiend of Zalatian's new compliance. (This decision eventually leads to the archon's downfall; see "Wrapping Up," below.)

If the PCs advise Zalatian to stop making shipments at all, he agrees. But he asks them to try to recover the stolen cargo from the yugoloths. (If the PCs later discuss the matter with the ultroloth, the creature laughs at the thought.) Barring the recovery of the arms, Zalatian allows the yugoloths to use the *cursed* weapons as they will.

And if the PCs counsel Zalatian to continue as he has in the past, he asks them to carry his "regrets" to the ultroloth in Hopeless. The archon lets the pieces fall where they may. (The PCs should return to Sigil as soon as possible to claim their payment from Spiral; chances are the aasimar won't be alive for too much longer.)

◆ WRAPPING UP ◆

If the PCs return to Spiral's home and tell him of their visit with Zalatian, the aasimar is truly shocked. Not only does an archon sit atop his chain of orders, but the blood is his own (heretofore unknown) father!

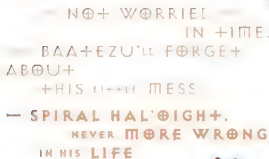
If the PCs reveal that Zalatian's deliveries will be controlled by the yugoloths in the future, Spiral doesn't much care — he'll still get paid. But if the aasimar learns that Zalatian will stop shipping arms altogether, he's quite annoyed with the party, and demands compensation for the loss of his future profits.

The PCs should also consider whether or not to turn Spiral in to the Harmonium for selling weapons to the fiends. In the Cage, the offense is punishable by 20 years' hard labor in the Prison, for it encourages violence in the city (or so goes the reasoning). Even worse, hordes of tanar'ri might swarm into the city looking for the berk who's been supplying their enemies with weapons.

AFTERMATH: THE AASIMAR

One way or another, Spiral's going to take a serious blow to his business. If the *cursed* weapons make it to the baatezu, his reputation with the lawful fiends is shot. If the weapons end up somewhere else, Spiral's no longer considered a dealer who can deliver the goods. Either way, he's not in a good position to capitalize on the loss.

However, if the PCs play their cards right, they can keep Spiral from losing too much power (or his life). The heroes can try to mollify the baatezu, perhaps convincing the fiends that the real culprits are the tanar'ri or the yugoloths — not Spiral. The PCs might even try to deliver new weapons to the baatezu so Spiral can keep his good name. Or maybe they can talk Spiral into switching sides and arming the

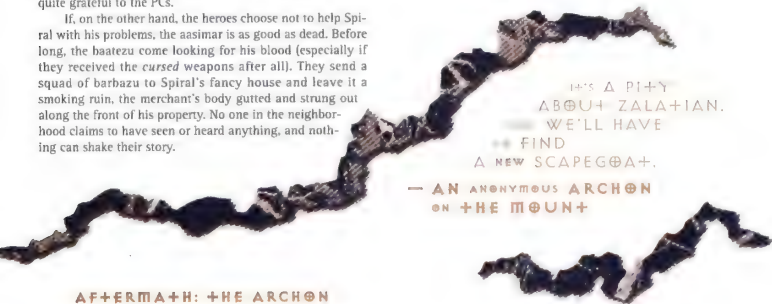


NOT WORRIED
IN TIME.
BAATEZU'LL FORGET
ABOUT
HIS LITTLE MESS
— SPIRAL HALFOUGHT.
NEVER MORE WRONG
IN HIS LIFE

tanar'ri. The chaotic fiends aren't reliable partners, but they might help defend their new supplier against vengeful baatezu.

No matter what, the stickiness of the matter causes Spiral's power in Sigil to fade quite a bit. But he's still a valuable ally. Though not nearly as influential as he was, he's quite grateful to the PCs.

If, on the other hand, the heroes choose not to help Spiral with his problems, the aasimar is as good as dead. Before long, the baatezu come looking for his blood (especially if they received the *cursed weapons* after all). They send a squad of barbazus to Spiral's fancy house and leave it a smoking ruin, the merchant's body gutted and strung out along the front of his property. No one in the neighborhood claims to have seen or heard anything, and nothing can shake their story.



AFTERMATH: THE ARCHON

If the PCs spread the chant about Zalatian's activities, the archon eventually falls from the grace of Mount Celestia and his superiors. Sure, the other archons had approved of the shady shipments all along, but they've got to cover their own wings. It just wouldn't do to have folks thinking that the celestials condone dealing with fiends.

The next time the heroes see Zalatian, he sits in the gutters of Sigil, wrapped in a tattered old blanket and begging for spare jink from the passers-by. His collar and breastplate — the symbols of his status — have been stripped from his body, leaving open, weeping sores on his neck and torso. His fellows let him keep his trumpet, but it's now a dull shade of lead, and it looks like it's starting to feel the effects of sitting outside in Sigil's rain.

The archon was stripped even of his name. The god can't remember to answer to "Zalatian" should the PCs hail him. But he does recall the faces and names of those responsible for his downfall, and seeks out the "heroes" who cost him his virtue. The fallen archon still has a bit of influence among those who honor favors done, and he's determined to strip the PCs of their good reputations — an eye for an eye — even if it takes years.

On the other hand, if the PCs kept quiet about Zalatian's involvement, they've made a friend for life in the archon camp. Zalatian knows that the PCs could have pulled him down into the mud (and still might), and finally realizes the questionable nature of his actions. Zalatian confesses his "crimes" to his superiors (though they secretly approved of the shipments), asking to be removed from dealing with weapons and fiends.

His high-ups on the Mount demote him a full rank, from a trumpet to a sword archon, in order to preserve their own face. 'Course, they eventually get another celestial to take the initiative in running weapons, but the loss of Zalatian puts a crimp in their plans for a while.

IT'S A PITY
ABOUT ZALATIAN.
WE'LL HAVE
-- FIND
A NEW SCAPEGOAT.
-- AN ANONYMOUS ARCHON
ON THE MOUNT

AFTERMATH: THE YUGOLOTHS

No matter what happens with the weapons shipments from the archons, the yugoloths are pleased with their handiwork. They've either rid themselves of the meddling celestials for good, or they've managed to get an archon under their thumb. And if Zalatian ignores the yugoloths and keeps selling arms, he soon falls (the 'loths expose his dirty dealings) and the shipments stop anyway.

STORY AWARDS

On top of whatever experience points the PCs may have earned during the adventure, the DM can grant them the following bonus points (to be split among the entire party). Some of the awards depend entirely on the DM's judgment.

Avoiding combat with the villagers: 800 XP.
Avoiding combat with the beholders: 400.
Recognizing the brigands as yugoloths: 400.
Saving the new cargo from the yugoloths: 200.
Convincing Braus to go to Zalatian: 500.
Wisely advising Zalatian: 1,000.
Saving Spiral from the baatezu: 1,000.

SQUARING THE CIRCLE

"My lord, I bring news of further victories and verification of the greatness of your plan." Crassag

bowed before the shadowy, faceless being before him. The chamber around the two figures was very dark. The nycaloth guessed that he was alone with his master, but he'd never actually seen any of the room beyond the path from the doorway to the dark lord's throne.

"Very good. Very good indeed." The ultraloth — Crassag did not know his master's name — seemed to be speaking to himself, thinking out loud, his form melding into the throne like clay. Smooth, supple hands caressed the arms of the rough stone seat. "Has the creature been found?"

"Not — not exactly." The gray ultraloth's face formed piercing white eyes that bore down upon Crassag.

The nycaloth cringed. "The haatezu keep moving it so that our forces are unable to locate it."

"We can delay no longer!" The loathsome figure leaped off the throne with surprising speed and

agility. "Those fools might actually realize what they have in their possession. Eons of planning could be ruined!"

Suddenly, the throne behind the ultraloth began to stretch and move, as though given life by his anger. It reached forward with stone arms and grasped Crassag tight. The nycaloth knew better than to cry out or to resist his master's magic. Instead, he merely closed his eyes and hoped for a quick death.

Then an idea struck him. Summoning a courage borne of centuries of Blood War combat, Crassag blurred out, "Wait, my lord! Why not force our pawns to find the creature? They've been groomed for just such a mission, haven't they?"

"Ah," the yugoloth master hissed. He paused for a moment, then clasped his smooth hands together. "Out of the mouth of babes. . ."

His fiery, opal-like eyes narrowed. "You're more crafty than I would have ever given you credit for, worm. I can't allow that."

A sudden flash of lavender and green illuminated the room, and for the first time, Crassag saw the chamber in full. Yugoloths of every type made up the walls and ceiling of the immense, cavernlike area. Each bore a visage of horror and agony on its face, mouth open in a silent scream.

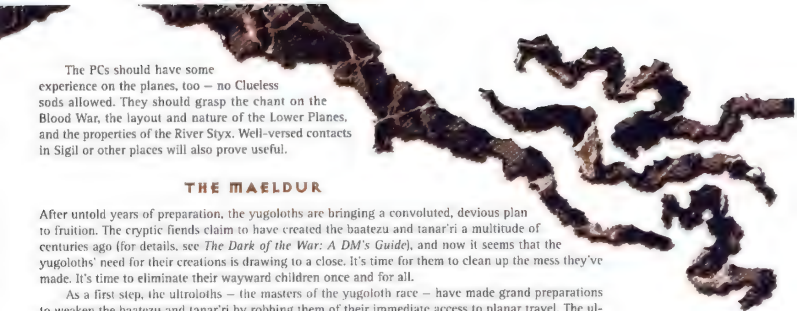
With a stony, jerking shuffle, the animate throne began to carry the nycaloth toward one of the walls. There was little question as to his fate, but still Crassag did not cry out.

"But your idea — I shall allow that," whispered the ultraloth, as he strode off into the darkness. "Yes, yes indeed."

◆ BACKGROUND ◆

"Squaring the Circle" is an adventure for 4–6 player characters of 6th–10th level (most PCs should be around 8th level). If the party contains fewer PCs, each character should be 9th or 10th level. A fair amount of sheer power is needed to get through the adventure alive — fiends are in abundance, and they aren't pushovers.

THE ONLY GOOD FIEND
IS A DEAD FIEND.
BU+ ONE +HA+
N+ +ELEPOT+
IS BE++ER +HAN
— GAHLAIN.
A PLANEWALKER



The PCs should have some experience on the planes, too — no Clueless sods allowed. They should grasp the chant on the Blood War, the layout and nature of the Lower Planes, and the properties of the River Styx. Well-versed contacts in Sigil or other places will also prove useful.

THE MAELDUR

After untold years of preparation, the yugoloths are bringing a convoluted, devious plan to fruition. The cryptic fiends claim to have created the baatezu and tanar'ri a multitude of centuries ago (for details, see *The Dark of the War: A DM's Guide*), and now it seems that the yugoloths' need for their creations is drawing to a close. It's time for them to clean up the mess they've made. It's time to eliminate their wayward children once and for all.

As a first step, the ulroloth — the masters of the yugoloth race — have made grand preparations to weaken the baatezu and tanar'ri by robbing them of their immediate access to planar travel. The ulroloth plans to strip the fiends of their innate power to *teleport without error*.

This goal is both easier and harder than it sounds. After all, the yugoloths conspired to grant the fiends the power in the first place. And they have the ability to take it away. It all depends on a single creature on Gehenna called Maeldur Et Kavurik, a behemoth known simply as the Maeldur.

The Maeldur is a beast of enormous size and bulk, twisted and manipulated by the yugoloths throughout the ages (far longer than even most deities can recall). The arcanaloths that tend to the beast whisper to it the dreadful names of every baatezu and tanar'ri in existence. The Maeldur is an interplanar guide, and can instantaneously open and close pathways at will. In essence, the leviathan is the central focus of a teleportational matrix, and it's the means by which the fiends manage to pop across the planes.

How? Any sod whose name is known to Maeldur Et Kavurik can mentally implore the beast for assistance. The Maeldur then projects the proper "path" to the traveler's mind, who subsequently can slip through the folds of reality. It all takes a fraction of a second, and it occurs subconsciously on the part of the traveler (though the Maeldur knows full well what it's doing). The baatezu and tanar'ri, naturally, just think that their *teleport without error* power is an innate gift.

Well, the yugoloths want to take that gift back. They plan to immerse the Maeldur in the River Styx, which'll make the beast forget all the names it knows — and ensure that those forgotten fiends can no longer teleport. Then, the 'loths will tell the behemoth their own names, along with the names of fiends that swear allegiance to them. This will rob their enemies of a great deal of power and force many to join the yugoloths' ranks.

Course, few baatezu and tanar'ri would ally themselves with the yugoloths if they knew that the 'loths had engineered the whole thing. Thus, the schemers plan to leak the dark of the Maeldur to the forces of light, and let *them* carry out the act of draining the beast's memory.

THE BEST LAID PLANS

The yugoloth plot seemed likely to succeed. After all, the lawful and chaotic fiends didn't even know that the Maeldur existed — until recently.

During a battle on Gehenna, an army of baatezu stormed deep into yugoloth territory, where they found the ancient citadel of Maeldur Et Kavurik. The pit fiend commander had no idea what the monstrosity was, but she was canny enough to realize that the creature was important. With impressively swift action, the baatezu modified a giant mobile fortress called the *Relentless* and loaded the Maeldur into a huge tank. Ever since, they've kept their strange prisoner on the move, its location always secret from the yugoloths.

The kidnapping has forced the ulroloth's hands. They figure that it's only a matter of time before the baatezu realize what they've stolen. Worse yet, new fiends spawned since the beast was spirited away lack the power to teleport — the arcanaloths on Gehenna couldn't tell the behemoth the berks' names. It seems likely that someone's going to tumble to the dark of it all — and soon.

Thus, the yugoloths have put their plan into action, letting chant of the Maeldur rise to the Upper Planes. Unfortunately, the pawns who carry out the deed now must *find* the leviathan first. And, more

than ever, speed is of the highest import — as is keeping secret the involvement of the 'loths.

In "Squaring the Circle," the PCs are dupes, serving the greater plan of the yugoloths. However, there's a fairly good chance that the heroes will figure out that they're actually playing into the fiends' hands. Even so, they'll still probably want to finish the adventure. Taking power away from the baatezu and tanar'ri will serve the forces of good at least as much as it'll help the yugoloths.

THE ADVENTURE'S FLOW

"Squaring the Circle" sends the player characters across the Lower Planes. Throughout the adventure, the Blood War's influence varies from a potent backdrop to a life-threatening danger.

First, the PCs must find an ancient baernaloth who knows the dark of the Maeldur. This requires research in Sigil and a trip to the Outlands gate-town of Torch. After a meeting with a powerful information broker and a run-in with tiefling thieves, the PCs locate the hidden baernaloth.



FIX IT: SO THE FIENDS
CAN'T SURE — THEN

THEY HOLD STILL
WHEN I HIT 'EM.

— GRAINGER OF THE HARMONIUM

The creature tells them to seek the *vuulge*, a magical item needed to find and speak with the Maeldur. Unfortunately, the *vuulge* lies in the Abyss, in a place called the Fortress of Indifference. But even before reaching that infernal plane, the PCs must deal with a greedy night hag and her henchmen, who threaten to reveal the party's secrets. A thief who follows the heroes might also uncover their mission — and cause trouble for them later.

In the Abyss, the PCs must bypass a host of fiendish guardians and traps before eventually wresting the *vuulge* from a barmy nalfeshnee and his allies. Once found, the magical item reveals that the Maeldur is on Baator, in the layer known as Maladomini.

One way or another, the PCs find a portal to Maladomini — one that dumps them in catacombs beneath the ancient city of Malatanni. Fighting their way out of the tunnels, the heroes must push through the ruined city — filled with fugitives from the baatezu — to reach the *Relentless*, a huge, mo-

bile fortress that houses the Maeldur. The city's also an opportunity to make a few allies (or yet more enemies).

The adventurers then must fight or sneak their way into the *Relentless*, find the Maeldur, and convince the leviathan to dump itself into the Styx. 'Course, the PCs must also hold off the baatezu and tanar'ri who try to stop them before it's too late — not to mention the yugoloths who try to kill their pawns when the work is done.

THE FACTIONS

Unlike many PLANESCAPE adventures, "Squaring the Circle" doesn't really involve the planar factions. The PCs can belong to any (or no) faction and still take part in the action. All that matters is that the heroes are benevolent enough to want to cause harm to the fiends.

♦ IT BEGINS ♦

It's assumed that the PCs are adventurers of at least some renown (after all, they're tested heroes and experienced planewalkers). Thus, Father Irynimas Sanuire (Pr/δ human/P12/LG), an ancient, ailing priest of Ukko (a power of the Finnish pantheon), seeks them out wherever they are in Sigil. He sends a note by courier to arrange a

meeting at a jovial pub.

If the PCs show up, they meet Father Sanuire — a kindly, wizened cleric who leans heavily on his staff and wheezes heavily as he speaks. As a prime, Father Sanuire spends most of his time on Qua-Nosham, his home world on the Prime Material Plane, but he's quite knowledgeable about the planes. He tells the PCs that he's heard tales of their exploits, and that he's haunted Sigil specifically to find them. His words are soft, carefully chosen, and sincere.

"Young men shall see visions, and old men shall dream dreams." So state the holy texts of Yirratama. Indeed great things have come upon me recently in dreams. But I'm obviously too old to receive the visions — visions regarding you, my friends."

The DM should allow for a few PC comments here, but the priest, undaunted, continues.

"Only recently did the great warrior Sir Praetol win a war of his own with the fiends of the dark planes. My world Qua-Nosham — as some name it — has been plagued by fiends: tanar'ri, baatezu, and yugoloths. Sir Praetol sought to take the fight to the enemy. Though the brave hero fell to a terrible disease soon after returning, he brought with him a secret known to few.

"The fiends have the ability to come and go as they please to any plane any world — this we already knew. Sir Praetol discovered how they do it. A foul creature of great size — Mael dur Et Karurik — gives them the power.

"This bloated abomination carves temporary paths through the multiverse, and the fiends use those paths to make their way to any destination they choose. But without the Mael dur, this ability is stripped away. The fiends will be limited just as you and I, with no power to simply appear and disappear at will.

"That's where my dream comes in. In this dream, one of the celestial stewards known as a deva came to me. She spoke of wondrous and strange things, and spoke of dealing a mighty blow to the fiends.

"The deva told me that it is possible to protect my world from their horrors for good. To see it accomplished, she guided me here told me that you were heroes who could do some thing with Sir Praetol's secrets. You could be the champions who tear this power from the fiends, making them weaker and easier to overcome forever more. The only question is . . . will you?"

Most PCs should be eager to take part. The mission doesn't just deal a few monsters a harsh blow, or save a lonely burg from some fiendish plot. It takes a major power away from all fiends *everywhere* in the multiverse — forever. The characters' names will be lauded in the annals of history for all time. Father Sanuire's offer is one of the greatest opportunities of any hero's career, and the priest assures the player characters that, if successful, they'll be the greatest champions of recent times.

Father Sanuire even hints of treasures beyond their wildest dreams, but offers no specifics except for the glory and reputation. "The aasimon themselves will most likely reward you," he says, sure of the truth of his statement but offering no proof or confirmation.

If the PCs ask about the particulars of the mission, the priest can't provide much. He does say, however, that the deva told him the Mael dur is no longer in the spot identified by Sir Praetol. The creature's been moved. Thus, the heroes' first task is simply to find the Mael dur. (The aging priest doesn't know where to begin looking, but he seems sure that the PCs are up to the task.)

THE REAL CHASE

The yugoloths secretly let Sir Praetol carry the knowledge of the Mael dur back to the Prime (and also let the celestials find out about it). However, Father Sanuire knows nothing about the plan to expose the Mael dur to the River Styx.

If the players ask, their characters have never heard of the priest or the world he comes from. However, the chant isn't hard to dig up —

•Qua-Nosham is indeed a prime-material world that the fiends have ravaged mercilessly.



◆ NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK ◆

When it comes to finding Maeldur Et Kavurik, the PCs are on their own. They can sniff out word on the street (or from other sources), they can scour magic shops and faction archives, or they can even visit the Great Library of Sigil — a little-known and underrated source of information and lore.

FOLKS IN +HE KNOW

As experienced bloods, the PCs probably have their own sources of information. They might turn to fellow faction members, sages, or other graybeards for chant on the Maeldur. Unfortunately, no one knows of the beast's existence, let alone its current location. Unless the PCs ask a streetwise friend or a fiend (see below), the best they get is a recommendation to try the city's Great Library (or some other equally prestigious bookhouse).

A STREETWISE FRIEND: A cutter up on the town's most current chant (as opposed to a sage trained in ancient lore) might be of help. If the PCs approach such a gossip, ask him about the Maeldur and/or teleporting fiends, and compensate him well, the informant reveals this: Some say a few of the newest, youngest fiends — those just created from larvae and the like — don't have the ability to teleport. No one knows why. The fiends, naturally, want to suppress the rumor and pass it off as barny talk. Thus, almost no one has heard of the rumor — not even many fiends.

The PCs' informant can't provide any knowledge about the Maeldur, but he feels the tidbit about the lost power is somehow related (and, of course, it is).

A FIEND: If a PC knows an approachable fiend, he might think to ask the lower-planar native about the Maeldur (a brave but perhaps foolish move). If he does, he finds some disheartening information. Any lesser fiend bristles at the thought of some other creature giving it the power to teleport. It insists that its powers are its own — it gets no help from anyone! And the fiend speaks what it believes to be the truth. With the exception of high-up yugoloths, no fiend knows of the Maeldur or the power it provides.

If the contact is a *greater* fiend, there's a 50% chance per point of the fiend's Intelligence that it's heard rumors (back on its home plane) that newly spawned fiends can't teleport. If so, the creature's might peery of the PCs — it seems too great a coincidence that the sods're asking questions about teleporting just when the power's dried up.

Assuming that the PCs' contact isn't an exile or outcast among its kind, it (or lesser fiends of its race) secretly begins to spy on the activities of the party. After the PCs visit Torch (later in this adventure), they might have an unwanted fiendish encounter.



THE GREAT LIBRARY

One of the oddities about life in Sigil is that everyone's concerned with the faction headquarters, the best weapon shops, and where the Lady of Pain last appeared, while only a handful of berks know about the more mundane locales. Probably the best example of this is the Great Library.

This city-sponsored facility is run by the dabus themselves, who spend most of their time making sure that clerks from faction libraries don't walk off with valuable books or stuff the shelves with smuggled propaganda. The Great Library tries to assert its independence — a body won't find much regarding the faction beliefs or organizations here.

The library's found in The Lady's Ward. It's a tall tower of seemingly endless open levels containing nothing but books, with a single spiral staircase winding up the center. In addition to housing thousands of tomes, the library's said to boast a few portals whose keys are always particular books. (Course, matching the right book to the right portal is amazingly difficult, so even those who know the portals are there don't bother.)

If the PCs come to the Great Library, they must each pay an entrance fee of 1 gp per day. And it takes 1d4 days of research to find information on the Maeldur — it's an incredibly obscure topic. The DM shouldn't hesitate to stress the rarity of the chant and the difficulty of the research. The DM might even have the researchers make numerous Intelligence checks each day (these are merely for show, and signify nothing).

But their persistence pays off. They find a reference to Maeldur Et Kavurik in an archaic tome called *Pihnmid's Translation*, a handwritten collection of translated excerpts from the legendary *Book of Inverted Darkness*.

"And in those dim days before the War of Blood, when Good was Evil's central foe and fiend did not war with fiend, a celestial named Maeldur was ripped from the heavens by a fiend named Daru Ib Shamiq. Maeldur was a native of the Celestial Mount, with shining emerald flesh and a dove's wings of purest white, like the snows of Pelion. Shamiq was of the clan of Baern, first among the fiends of the Three Gloom and sires of the General of Gehenna.

"Shamiq, in motives twisting and tangled, took the noble Maeldur and told him of things no creature of purity should know. The words of the Baern had power — at least in those days — and when shaped into the form of dark secrets, they wrought terrible consequences. Maeldur was changed.

"The celestial was a creature of light no longer. And though much of its essence was stripped away, it was given great powers of a different kind. Daru Ib Shamiq then hid... the Maeldur away, fashioning a talisman that let others speak to it in the words of the Baern — the only words it could now hear.

"Even today, the creature torn from the Mount serves some central, fiendish purpose. Shamiq, however, disappeared into the First Gloom, at a place once called Daubei's Obscure Woe."

If the PCs look up any of the names or events from this passage, all they find (after another full day of research) is a mention of Daubei's Obscure Woe. It's listed as a location that slid onto Gehenna millennia ago, thanks to yugoloth activity. The reference comes from a book entitled *Localities on the Outlands: Volume IV, the Gate-Towns*. It's a more recent work (only a few hundred years old), and it notes that a small estate named after Daubei's Obscure Woe was built in the gate-town of Torch. The owner of the estate is listed as "Daruib Chamek."

This minor lead regarding the estate is all the PCs're going to get. They can continue their research for as long as they'd like, but there's simply nothing more to be found. Torch seems to be the best bet.

◆ TØRCH ◆

If the PCs decide to visit the gate-town, it's an easy trip. In the Market Ward is a well-known portal used by merchants who trade with Torch. The portal's location (an archway over a side street) and key (a three-inch iron rod) are commonly known.

Fact is, a tool vendor in a nearby shop — a sarcastic berk named Riithonis (Pl/♀ giitheraai/Bleak Cabal/CN) — sells the keys for 12 sp each. She even sells rough maps of the town for 2 sp (at this point, the DM should show the players the map of Torch on page 20–21 of *Visions of War*). But Riithonis asks the PCs why they're headed for Torch, noting that they're obviously not merchants. If the PCs say anything along the lines of "we're looking for information," Riithonis gives them advice: "Chant in Torch costs a fair amount of jink, but be peery of knights of the cross-trade."

The Market Ward portal leads to a natural archway of volcanic rock just outside of Torch. As soon as the PCs arrive, read:

Behold, torch — gate-town to Gehenna. As you adjust to your new surroundings, you're buffeted by sights, sounds, and odors; and all of them are foul.

The city's built on three volcanic spires that rise up out of a blood-red marsh. The lower portion of town, which sprawls out in front of you, is unbound by walls or gates. But the upper sections of Torch, rising high on each spire, are walled in separately, connected by huge bridges stretching far overhead. Higher still is the gate to Gehenna, a glowing red portal that hangs in midair like a monstrous, unblinking eye.

The entire town's blanketed in the reddish glow of the one still-active spire, and the strange gases that spew from various fissures and ignite with the air. These gases give the air an acrid, sulfurous taste and a gritty feel that collects on your tongue and teeth.

By the explosive red lights that fill the sky, you can see that the people of the lower town are poor, malnourished, and diseased. The conditions of the buildings tell you that

WE DON'T LIKE
YOUR KIND HERE IN TØRCH.

— ZEANIL RENALD,
+O EVERYONE
HE MEETS

*these folks're exposed
to frequent flooding —
as well as other horrors sure
to come from the swamp that surrounds the spires.*

*Despite the volcanic activity, the winds blow cold in
Torch, causing you to shiver involuntarily.*

Getting into the lower town is simple, as there is no wall. The bottom part of town's the most dangerous, home to the poorest, most desperate of sods — folks who'd just as soon cut a body's throat as say hello. The nearby blood marsh brings the residents disease and even monsters. Giant toads, killer frogs, giant leeches, poisonous snakes (some giant-sized), insects (again, many giant-sized), and even alligators wander into the slums from the horrible swamp.

Torch has three upper sections — Karai, Maygel, and Dohin — one on each spire. The upper sections are walled in, but they're all joined by huge bridges that pass over the lower town. The high-ups of Torch like to pass the time by standing on the bridges and watching the sods of the lower town try to survive.

Once the PCs make it into the boundaries of the upper sections, they can look around in relative safety. But they won't find a place called Daubei's Obscure Woe, nor anyone who will (can?) give them directions. Instead, most folks point the party to the *Festhall of the Falling Coins*, claiming that its owner, Badurth, knows everything about Torch that there is to know. 'Course, the townsfolk ask the PCs for a few silvers first — information isn't free.

THE RUM CHANT: It's clear that Torch ain't a nice place. For more details about the burg, refer to the *PLANESCAPE* accessory *A Player's Primer to the Outlands*.

THE FEST+HALL

The *Festhall of the Falling Coins* is fairly easy to find, located near the center of the most frequented part of Maygel. It's a large, two-story building with a huge central hall lit by many fireplaces. The first floor offers entertainment for the masses. The second floor has only private chambers, store-rooms, and quarters for the workers.

The *Festhall* got its name from a unique fountain in the center of the large, open hall that literally flows with coins. It's considered bad luck to try to take a coin, and for good reason — powerful magical traps guard the fountain. If any would-be knight of the post tries to loot the jink, he suffers 1d6 points of electrical damage from each coin touched.

The ground floor of the *Festhall* offers a wide variety of entertainment, including dancers, music, gambling, and oc-

asionally hardic tale-tellers. The atmosphere is bawdy but peaceful. After all, the place serves as neutral ground for the six major thieves' guilds in town (they're always at war), and as a safe haven for any berk on the run. No violence occurs here unless the proprietor wishes it.

And he rarely does. The owner of the *Festhall* is a sickly, shriveled drow named Badurth. As the PCs were told, he knows the dark of everyone and everything in Torch. He doesn't see most visitors, usually keeping to a private room on the second floor where he has meals, enjoys a little entertainment, and conducts *Festhall* business. Badurth is a mighty wizard, but he gained most of his strength by reputation — and by winning the respect of the leaders of the town's thieves' guilds. In his place of business, his word is law, and sods either obey or end up dead. Badurth isn't the most powerful or influential high-up in Torch, but he's close.

Getting in to see him isn't easy. If the PCs ask any of the *Festhall*'s employees about seeing Badurth, they're questioned as to the nature of their business. But if the heroes mention Daru Ib Shamiq or Daubei's Obscure Woe, the worker raises an eyebrow or two. Such topics aren't the normal fare in the *Festhall*. The employee heads up to Badurth's private room, returning a few minutes later with orders to escort the PCs in.

The small room is filled with smoke, and contains only a single mahogany table and a few chairs. As you enter, you get a glimpse of a scantily-clad elf dancer being hurried out a side door by a shadowy servant.

Seated at the table in front of a partially eaten meal is a shriveled old elf with chalky black skin. His ink, almond-shaped eyes turn to narrow, bloodshot

as he looks you up and down. Long white hair spills in front of his face and over his shoulders. He

wears a tunic of midnight silk



and a red cloak covers his shoulders despite the warmth from the room's fireplace.

Taking a long drag from a stem of smoldered, he tosses the butt onto his hearth and says, in a hoarse wheeze: "What would bring you to want to stick your noses into an old forgotten thing like this?"

Badurth wants to know why the PCs are interested in (or even know about) Shamiq or Daubei's Obscure Woe. If the characters flash enough jink – 5,000 gp – the drow agrees to give them the information with no questions asked (though he may use a *charm* or *suggestion* from his ring of human influence to get them to speak more freely). But if the PCs simply explain why they want the chant, Badurth reduces the fee to 1,000 gp.

If he gets his price, he wheezes out the following:

"Darn th Shamiq is an ancient fiend that still dwells in the best of my knowledge – in a tiny stretch of land in the first furnace of Gehenna. This place, Daubei's Obscure Woe, can be reached only through a ruined building here in Torch – an estate run a long time ago by some well-to-do business, probably Shamiq in some other form. It's on the other side of town from here – not a good part of town, but then, there's no good part of Torch.

As the PCs leave, Badurth warns them that common belief holds that the ruins are haunted.

Badurth (Pr/d elf [drow]/F9,M9/CE): AC 3 [chain mail +2]; MV 12; hp 31; THACO 12; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6+1 (short sword +1); SA spell-like powers; SD infravision 120', saving throw, surprise; SW magical light; MR 68%; SZ M (5' tall); ML steady (12); XP 9,000.

Notes: Badurth (pronounced b'derth) is withered and ill due to a long-term addiction to a dangerous drug. This accounts for his low Strength, Dexterity and Constitution for a fighter of his race. He's originally from the prime-material world of Toril, and many have noted that his name (and the name he gave the *Festhall*) mark him as a native of those forgotten realms. He doesn't seem to care.

SA—has the following spell-like powers (each 1/day): dancing lights, darkness 15' radius, detect magic, faerie fire, know alignment, and levitate.

SD—gains +2 on saving throws versus magical attacks.

SD—surprised only on a roll of 1 on a d10.

SW—suffers –2 to attack rolls in magical light.

S 8, D 12, C 8, I 17, W 13, Ch 12.

Personality: conceited, jaded, nosy, and greedy.

Special Equipment: chain mail +2, short sword +1 (neither are drow items – both were forged in Sigil), ring of human influence, 12 pp, 1,000-gp ring, 2,000-gp pendant.

Spells (4/3/3/2/1): 1st—burning hands, change self, feather fall, magic missile; 2nd—blur, ESP, rope trick; 3rd—clairvoyance, fireball, fly; 4th—confusion, dimension door; 5th—wall of force.

◆ THE WEB OF THIEVES ◆

At this point in the adventure, a group of cross-traders belonging to the Severed Hand (one of Torch's many thieves' guilds) takes an interest in the PCs. Poking around the *Festhall of the Falling Coins* is a good way to get information, but it's also sure to attract attention. The Severed Hand's convinced that the party works for one of the other guilds (such as the Kindred of Yoj or the Gray Orb), and they want to know the dark of the matter.

As the PCs leave the *Festhall of the Falling Coins*, five tieflings from the Severed Hand tail them through the dirty streets of Torch. The leaders, Rig and Phikus, wait until the time is right, and then maneuver around so that the five come at the heroes from all sides.

"So, what's going on 'ere now, my friends?" Rig asks, as the members of the Hand draw their weapons and brandish them cruelly. Each holds his blade so that the red glow from the spires glints menacingly off of the fine edge.

Rig wants to know which guild the PCs work for and what they're up to. He's too short-sighted to believe that the party's not connected to one of the town's villainous groups. If the heroes really frustrate Rig (which they will, unless they lie convincingly), he orders his gang to attack.

Toward the end of the fight, no matter who has the upper hand, a stout bariaur intervenes to help the PCs defeat the tieflings. He gives his name as Thessol, and though he pretends to be a helpful citizen, he actually works for Tiamat's Chosen, one of Torch's other thieves' guilds. Thessol also wants to know what the PCs are up to, but he hopes to charm the truth out of them rather than use force.

After the battle with the Severed Hand, Thessol explains that the streets just aren't safe anymore and jovially asks about the PCs' business. If they avoid answering or obviously lie, Thessol acts hurt (after all, he's just trying to be "friendly"). The bariaur tries to tag along with the party wherever they go, bragging about his exploits and subtly trying to worm more chant out of them.

The PCs will have a very difficult time getting Thessol to go away. Even if they force him to leave, he drinks his *potion of invisibility* and tries to follow them unseen, hoping to spy on their destination and business.

PLANESCAPE: None of the thieves' guilds in Torch have any strong faction ties. The roguish groups have taken on such importance that most folks in town – especially the guild members themselves – have no time or use for the factions. Thus, if any PCs have the faction benefit of being able to influence reactions, the skill works only about half the time in Torch.

Note also that the tieflings in this encounter don't all have the same abilities described in the *PLANESCAPE MONSTRIOUS COMPENDIUM Appendix*. As will be detailed in the upcoming *Planewalker's Handbook* (August 1996 release), tieflings can be born with a wide variety of powers, immunities, and "quirks."

Rig (PI/♂ *tiefling*/T7/NE): AC 6 (leather armor, Dex); MV 12; hp 27; THACO 17; #AT 2 (ambidextrous); Dmg 1d6/1d4+1 (club/dagger +1); SA spell-like powers; SD immunities; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); XP 3,000.

Notes: Rig has long, draconic ears.

SA—can cast *chill touch* (1/day) and *mirror image* (1/day).

SD—suffers half damage from cold, electricity, and acid. S 12, D 16, C 10, I 10, W 8, Ch 6.

Personality: overbearing, conceited, rash.

Special Equipment: dagger +1 (forged in Sigil), *potion of healing*, club, 32 gp, 24 sp.

Thief Abilities: PP 60, OL 52, F/RT 55, MS 65, HS 53, DN 25, CW 94, RL 40.

Phikus (PI/♀ *tiefling*/F5/CE): AC 4 (chain mail, Dex); MV 12; hp 35; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (hand axe); SA spell-like powers; SD immunities, saving throw bonus; SW can't enter "holy" areas; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); XP 650.

Notes: Phikus has black teeth, black nails, and black pupils in black eyes.

SA—can cast *blur* (1/day).

SD—suffers half damage from heat; gains +2 to saving throws vs. spell and rod/staff/wand.

S 14, D 15, C 16, I 8, W 9, Ch 8.

Personality: barmy (psychopathic).

Special Equipment: hand axe, 1d12 gp, 2d12 sp.

Severed Hand guild members (PI/var *tiefling*/T4/NE) (3): AC 8 (leather armor); MV 12; hp 12 each; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword); SA spell-like powers; SD immunities, saving throw bonus; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (13); Int average (10); XP 420 each.

Notes: The trio consists of a male with six fingers on each hand, a female with greenish hair and pointed teeth, and another female with goatlike legs and horns sprouting from her forehead.

SA—can cast *darkness* 15' radius (1/day).

SD—half damage from cold; +2 to saving throws vs. fire, electricity, and poison.

Special Equipment: short sword, 1d12 gp, 2d12 sp.

Thief Abilities: PP 45, OL 37, F/RT 40, MS 43, HS 35, DN 15, CW 88, RL 25.

Thessol (PI/♂ *bariaur*/F6/NE): AC 6 (bracers, Dex); MV 15; hp 48; THACO 15 (14 with Sir, 13 with *battle-axe* +1); #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (head-butt) or 1d8+2 (*battle-axe* +1, Str); SA charge; SD surprise, saving throw bonus; MR 100%; SZ M (6' tall); ML fanatic (18); XP 1,400.

SA—head-butt damage is tripled when charging; size M or S targets are knocked down 50% of the time.

SD—gains +2 bonus on surprise rolls; gains +1 bonus on saving throw vs. spell.

S 17 (+1, +1), D 16, C 15, I 12, W 11, Ch 14.

Personality: sneaky, annoying, ingratiating.

Special Equipment: bracers of defense AC 8, *battle-axe* +1 (both forged in Sigil), *potion of invisibility*, 13 gp, 21 sp.

SPENDING TIME ◆ IN TORCH ◆

After meeting with Badurth and dealing with the Severed Hand, the PCs'll probably want to check out the ruined building known as Daubei's Obscure Woe (see below).

However, if they choose to poke around in Torch, they might want to explore, equip themselves, or just rest. Torch has plenty of places to sleep, from expensive inns to shoddy old kips. Places of good repute are found in great numbers around the *Festhall of the Falling Coins*, and a few others are scattered throughout the upper sections of the city. 'Course, PCs must come up with some hefty jink to stay in such fine inns — at least 5–10 gp per night.

If the PCs are leatherheaded enough to stay in a flop-house in the lower sections of Torch, they might end up losing *more* jink — and their lives — to thieves in the night.

As for buying supplies, the PCs won't have much idea what to expect in the coming encounters (even with Badurth's information). Without sure answers, they might try to equip themselves to prepare for potential dangers. The town's upper section of Karal has a large marketplace that offers most goods listed in the *PLAYER'S HANDBOOK*, as well as the following items:

Holy water (rare in Torch)50 gp
Potion of <i>fire resistance</i>1,000 gp
Half-strength potion of <i>fire resistance</i>600 gp
Ring of <i>fire resistance</i>10,000 gp
Ring of <i>Gehennan protection</i>4,000 gp

While the magical items aren't exactly common in Torch, they're available simply because travelers headed to Gehenna need them to stay alive.

THE REAL CHANT: A ring of *Gehennan protection* is identical to a ring of *fire resistance*, except that it functions only on Gehenna, and only against heat, flame, and lava from the plane itself. The ring has no effect on fiery attacks from the plane's inhabitants. What's more, the special ring works only on Khalas and Chamada, the first two layers of the plane — they're the hot ones. Any sod traveling to cold Mungoth or icy Krangath is on his own.

DAUBEI'S ◆ OBSCURE WO ◆

If the PCs follow Badurth's directions to Daubei's Obscure Woe, they find it to be a nearly collapsed building that was once surrounded by a solid walled courtyard (refer to the map on page 47). The wall's long since tumbled down, much of its stone carried away for use in other buildings. Ra-

zovrine and other creeping plants have spread over the ruin's surface, but the entrance is still fairly clear. Close examination reveals that no one's gone in or out of the place in a very, very long time.

Centuries ago, the baernaloth known as Daru Ib Shamiq lived on the Gray Waste, in a small underground chamber below a place called Daubei's Obscure Woe. Against his will, however, the entire area shifted to Gehenna, and he found that his chamber no longer had an exit. Not wishing to interact with the yugoloths on the plane anyway, Shamiq instead fashioned a magical gateway to Torch.

Taking human form as "Daruib Chamek," the fiend had a mansion built around the Torch end of the gate, and named the house Daubei's Obscure Woe. The dwelling was a valuable front to maintain, as it allowed him access to mortal contacts. But his human identity was known as a hermit, and Shamiq rarely visited the mansion. Years later, when he stopped appearing at the estate altogether, folks just assumed that Daruib Chamek died.

To keep nosy berks away, the baernaloth created the rumor that restless, unclean spirits haunted the dwelling. Just to be sure, he posted guardians to keep watch. Both measures have proven successful — no one's ever found the secret gate that leads to his underground chamber.

THE COURTYARD

When the PCs approach the ruined mansion, the first thing they notice is the courtyard.

The courtyard is overgrown. Vines and other plants cover rubble from the destroyed wall and a few small outbuildings. Several rodents scurry about the debris, and you spot a snake slithering through the thick weeds. A corner of the courtyard seems to be a small, forgotten graveyard, the headstones barely visible beneath the growth. In the center of the graveyard, a statue of a man leans heavily to one side, the stone wrapped with vines.

The statue is of Daruib Chamek, the baernaloth's human disguise, built to further the illusion. Fact is, even though all nine of the gravestones in the "cemetery" are inscribed with names, eight of them are fake — no bodies lie beneath the ground. Only one stone marks the resting place of a corpse. Using methods unknown today, Shamiq killed a minor yugoloth long ago and buried it here in such a manner as to ensure that its ghost would return and haunt the place.

If the PCs snoop around in the courtyard or spend more than three rounds in the area, the yugoloth's ghost appears



and tries to age them or chase them away. It's a spectral, howling spirit, but it definitely looks somewhat fiendish — it sports horns and seems quite bestial. The ghost can be turned by a cleric, and it can be destroyed instantly by simply overturning its headstone. 'Course, the PCs must find the *right* gravestone — there are nine to choose from, with no way to tell which belongs to the ghost.

SLEEPING ON THE BURNING: Normally, a ghost shouldn't be able to exist on the Outer Planes — the creatures are linked with the Ethereal and Negative Energy Planes. And the ghost of a *yugoloth* seems even more unlikely. If the players ask, the DM can admit that ghosts shouldn't exist here, and perhaps even suggest that its presence indicates that the PCs have stumbled upon something very powerful or arcane — or both.

Yugoloth ghost: AC 0; MV 9; HD 10; hp 52; THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg age 1d4x10 years; SA age, fear; SD silver resistance, +1 or better weapons to hit; SW holy water; SZ M (6' tall); ML fearless (20); Int high (13); AL NE; XP 7,000.

Notes: This special ghost is noncorporeal but has no link to the Ethereal Plane (or, for that matter, the Negative Energy Plane).

SA—anyone who sees the ghost must save vs. spell or age 10 years and flee for 2d6 turns (priests above 6th level are immune, and all PCs above 8th level gain +2 to their saving throws).

SD—silver weapons inflict only half damage.
SW—holy water inflicts 1d6+1 points of damage.

LEAVING THE MANSION

The ironbound wooden door leading into Daubei's Obscure Woe is slightly ajar, but the PCs can't open it unless they make a successful open doors roll (the door's hinges are virtually rusted shut, and the doorway's blocked with debris).

Each room described below is dimly lit by small windows and holes in the walls. However, none of the rooms were ever actually used; the mansion was merely a cover for Shamiq's true activities.

ENTRY CHAMBER

This room is a large entry chamber that has fallen into decay. Dust and debris cover the carpeted floors, and the decorative wall hangings are faded and threadbare. A few tiny rodents scurry across the floor and away as the PCs enter, but nothing else moves or makes a sound.



2. HALLWAY

When the PCs enter this corridor, they draw the attention of another of Shamiq's guardians — a guardian yugoloth.

As you enter this empty hall, you hear a low moaning. It quickly grows into a high-pitched whine, and a smell not unlike rotting flesh assaults your nostrils. Suddenly, a huge, horrific creature — a winged, demonic bear with horns like a ram — appears in front of you, ready to rend your flesh with terrible talons!

Unless the PCs leave the mansion, the guardian yugoloth struggles tirelessly and fights to the death. Its special powers and defenses reflect the nature of its creator; the party'll need a potent mage or two to defeat the beast.

Guardian yugoloth (greater): AC -1; MV 9, FI 9 (D); HD 10; hp 68; THACO 11; #AT 3; Dmg 1d12/1d12/1d10 (claw/claw/horns); SA breathe fire, *suggestion*; SD immunities; SW cold; MR 25%; SZ L (9' tall); ML fanatic (18); Int high (13); AL NE; XP 13,000.

SA—can breathe fire (3/day) in a 30-foot-long cone with a 10-foot-diameter base (flames cause 7d6 points of damage).

SD—can make a *suggestion* (1/round), even while in combat.

SD—immune to attacks from all weapons, as well as *charm*, *fear*, *hold*, *sleep*, and *polymorph* spells.

SW—suffers double damage from cold attacks.

3. LIBRARY

This room was obviously a library, as each wall is covered with bookshelves. However, about half of the shelves are empty, their books spilled all over the floor. The PCs also spy a strange being:

In the far corner of the room, a blatted wormlike creature sits atop a pile of half-eaten books. The thing is 3 feet long, with a humanlike face and tiny humanoid arms. It chomps happily on a fat book as it watches you.

An experienced planewalker might mistake this creature for a larva. It's not — it was created by Shamiq on Gehenna (it escaped through the fiend's gate and now resides in the ruins). The worm was once a man, but years of magical experimentation have rendered it completely inhuman. It looks at the PCs and watches them as they move about the room, but it won't communicate in any way. It cares only for eating, and it eats nothing but wood products.

Anyone who checks out the uneaten books notices that the tomes are particularly worthless. Fact is, the library seems to have held multiple copies of common books full of mostly useless information. (The DM may wish to

require the PCs to make Intelligence checks to come to this realization.)

Wood-worm: AC 10; MV 3; HD 3; hp 16; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1 (bite); SZ M (5' long); ML average (8); Int average (10); AL N.

4 & 6. BEDCHAMBERS

These rooms seem to have been quite elegant at one time, but now the beds are covered with dust and mildew, the dressers lie on their sides, and the chests of drawers have been smashed by support beams fallen from the ceiling.

Course, because these bedrooms were just fakes in the first place, they contain nothing of value.

5. LABORATORY

Long tables covered with glassware and tools, shelves lined with various containers from bottles to jars to barrels — this room seems to have been a laboratory of some kind. Everything's covered with dust, and most equipment is broken or decayed.

Again, the room holds nothing of value. Some of the bottles contain chemicals, but they're mundane materials (mild acids, salts, and so on). Any PC who makes a successful Intelligence check at -4 (or a proficiency check in a skill involving chemicals) realizes that this room lacks a number of components vital to any laboratory. In other words, no one ever used this laboratory — or even intended to use it. It's just for show.

7. STOREROOM

This dirty chamber is practically empty, containing only old barrels of stagnant water and crates of straw.



THE SPY

Thessol the bariaur might still be following the PCs invisibly as they enter and explore the mansion. If so, he remains hidden, making no effort to help the adventurers out of any trouble or danger.

However, if Thessol proceeds to the Gehennan chambers (see below), the bariaur detects the spy with his *true seeing* ability. The bariaur realizes that he's been spotted and tries to flee. Shamiq won't try to stop him, but he might mention the incident to the PCs (if they aren't openly hostile toward him).

THE GEHENNAN CHAMBERS

The closed door at the end of the hallway (area 2) is a magical gate to Daru Ib Shamiq's secret chambers on Gehenna. The key that opens the gate is simple — a body's just got to break the plane of the doorway.

If the PCs merely open the door, all they see beyond is darkness — they can't tell what awaits. However, anyone (or anything) that breaks the plane of the doorway is instantly pulled all the way through with incredible force, ending up in an underground chamber in Khalas (the first layer of Gehenna). Each area of Shamiq's den is lit by a horrible glow the color of rust, a glow with no apparent source. The

chambers are insufferably warm, but not hot enough to cause damage to the PCs. However, the party is still subject to any physical and magical alterations that occur on Gehenna.

8. DARU IB SHAMIQ

When the PCs pass through the gate, the DM shouldn't blurt out their new location (as far as the heroes know, they're still in the ruined mansion). Read:

In this innermost chamber, things feel different, as though you're passed through a membrane and into a new environment. The air is warm and moist. The walls are coated with a paste that looks like mucus. In the shadows of the far corner, a large form is spurred to movement, and a surprisingly long, gray arm — covered with dripping boils and sores — reaches out into the light.

The horrid arm beckons you a little closer, and then bids you to stop. Now that you see the shadowy form more clearly, you wish that you couldn't. Gray, flabby skin stretches tight over long, gangly bones in some places, yet hangs in multitudinous folds in others. Yellow, pus-filled eyes stare out at you but seem to see nothing. The thin stalks of age and disease

its mismatched jaws open as if to speak. Then the twisted creature gives a heavy, wet sigh. "I've been waiting for a long, long time."

The DM should let the PCs express their surprise (and probable distrust of) the fiendish-looking creature.

At this point, show the players the picture of the baernaloth on page 9 of *Visions of War*.

Pausing only to give a deep, phlegm-filled wheeze, the baernaloth continues.

"You've come here about Maeldur Et Kavarik. You're come to put it down. But you don't know where it is. And you expect me to tell you."

The gray creature wheezes. "The funny thing is — I will."

Daru Ib Shamiq pauses here to let the PCs speak. He ignores any questions about himself or his present location or situation.

If the PCs ask about the courtyard ghost or the guardian yugoloth, Shamiq says: "Liked that, did you? Well, a true artist never reveals his trade secrets." If the heroes bring up the wood-worm, the baernaloth furrows his already contorted face. "He's escaped again, eh? I don't much care anymore."

If the PCs rattle their bone-boxes about any other matters but the Maeldur, Shamiq refuses to give them any answers (he pretends that he has the answers, though, even if he really doesn't). "That's not what you came here for," he says.

If the PCs ask Shamiq about the Maeldur, the baernaloth has quite a bit to say.

"There's a condition." Its dry, cracked lips curl into a grimace. "There's always a condition — whether they tell you about it or not. Heh. Believe me — you're talking to one of the oldest deal-makers and string-pullers in existence."

The mockery of the smile disappears. "I do not exaggerate, nor am I a braggart. I saw the powers that now live a-borning, and the powers before them as well. But you must know this, or you wouldn't be here."

"In any case, the condition is this: Do not kill the Maeldur. Instead, tell it that it can be free. It could always have freed itself. It just didn't know. That's how we work, you know. Swear that you will free the Maeldur — swear upon your souls — and I will tell you how to find it."

Daru Ib Shamiq owes no allegiance to the yugoloth hierarchy as it stands today. He doesn't care about the ultroloths' plans, the outcome of the Blood War, or much of anything else. The ancient fiend doesn't even care about his own well-being. But in an almost incomprehensible way, Shamiq is glad that the wrongs he inflicted upon the Maeldur so long ago might finally be righted. The feelings don't quite reach what a body might call regret or remorse, but they're as close as a fiend can get.

He truly wants to help the PCs find the Maeldur. If they agree to his terms, Shamiq tells what he knows:

"Actually, I don't know where the Maeldur is. It's been moved — taken by force, most likely. But I know how it can be found. I made sure of that in the early days — I was always thorough."

"What you need is a green gem called the vaulge, it's a magical item that confers the power to know the Maeldur's location. It also allows you to speak to the behemoth in a language it can understand."

"The arcanaloths discarded the vaulge long ago, after they learned to speak with the Maeldur directly. Fools. It passed from hand to hand until it fell into the clutches of a tamar'i named Tapheon. But he doesn't even know what the vaulge is — doesn't know what it can do. Not surprising."



Few, if any, of the younger fiends even know the Maeldui exists. But it knows they exist, oh, yes — the Maeldui knows all of the fiends. Pity.

"No matter. Tapheon is holed up in a place known as the Fortress of Indifference, on the 348th layer of the Abyss.

"Now, leave me be."

At this point, the baernaloth secretly activates a trap on the gate that leads into the chamber. Each PC must make a saving throw vs. spell at -2. Those who fail are drawn back through the archway and returned to the mansion in Torch; they can't re-enter the gate by any means. Those who succeed can remain in Shamiq's chambers, though the baernaloth tells them to begone (using his charm, suggestion, or emotion powers if necessary).

If, at any time, the PCs engage Shamiq in combat, he fights back — for a short while, anyway. Eventually, he stops resisting and simply lets the PCs kill him. He doesn't really want to live any longer.

Daru Ib Shamiq (yugoloth — baernaloth): AC -4; MV 12; HD 11+22; hp 81; THACO 9; #AT 3; Dmg 1d8/1d8/2d6 (claw/claw/flangs); SA reopen wounds, spell-like powers; SD +3 or better weapons to hit; MR 50%; SZ L (8' tall); ML elite (14); Int exceptional (16); AL NE; XP 19,000.

SA—if Shamiq has inflicted damage on a foe during the previous 24 hours, he can cause the wounds to reopen so that the foe instantly suffers the same amount of damage (maximum of one round's worth of damage). Shamiq can use this power 3/day, but he must be within 10 yards of the foe. He can also instantly heal some or all damage inflicted on a foe (if he wishes to keep his victim alive).

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *alter self*, *animate dead*, *cause disease* (reverse of cure disease), *charm person*, *cloudkill* (3/day), *darkness 15' radius*, *demand* (1/day), *detect lie*, *detect magic*, *emotion*, *fear*, *improved phantasmal force*, *produce flame*, *suggestion*, *symbol* (1/day), *teleport without error*, and *true seeing* (3/day).

Personality: detached, slightly remorseful.

9. THE REAL LABORATORIES

If the PCs somehow get past Shamiq and explore other areas of his Gehennan chambers, they discover the baernaloth's real laboratories:

Before you notice anything else, you notice the faces — dozens of faces stare out at you from every wall of

this chamber. Then you see the glass containers, filled with semiclear fluids that both reveal and distort the things floating within. Each container holds at least one creature, and the strange beings move little—or not at all.

So many faces, eyes, arms, tentacles—too many. Each of these . . . things seems to be the result of hideous experimentation. You see remnants of so many creatures—insects, snakes, rats, worms, spiders, slugs, octopi, fish, birds, bats, cats, dogs, bears, apes, elves, dwarves, and, of course, human—in combined in disturbing, disgusting ways.

Shining, metallic tools lay neatly displayed on a black cloth-covered table, their purposes too gruesome to dwell upon for long.

A master of biological experimentation, the baernaloth uses magic and arcane lore to reshape (and interbreed) all manner of creatures to form whole new beings. If the PCs peer into the glass containers, they can get a good look at some of Shamiq's experiments, including:

- ◆ A faceless creature with an ape's body, a serpent's tail and tentacles for arms and legs that end in round, eyeball-covered appendages.
- ◆ A female elf with batwings sprouting from her back and spidery legs jutting from random places on her head and body. Worse, her flesh is transparent, making all organs, bones, and muscles visible.
- ◆ A large, bloated human head with three sluglike bodies hanging from its neck.

Each of the labs contains 1d4x1,000 gp worth of chemicals, equipment, and instruments that they can sell to most any alchemist. Moving the stuff is difficult, though—most of it's fragile, bulky, and heavy.

If the PCs made it into the real laboratories without killing Shamiq, when they return to room 8 they find that the baernaloth has vanished. The fiend used *teleport without error* to take his leave; he no longer has any interest in his experiments, and doesn't much care what the PCs do with his equipment.

THE REAL CHANT: Daru Ib Shamiq's magic is all that keeps the laboratory abominations alive. The wood-worm that escaped to the mansion's library is the only creature able to live outside its glass tank. If the PCs remove any other creatures from the life-giving fluid, the foul, pathetic things simply die.

◆ BLACKMAIL ◆

When the PCs decide to leave Torch, they run into a decrepit but canny night hag known as Oppinimos Mar. She rides a fearsome nightmare, and stands with two allies—a shadow fiend named Asteriav and a farastu gehreleth named Chaun. However, Asteriav hides in the shadows beneath the steed, and Chaun is currently invisible. The party sees only the hag and the horse.

As the PCs approach, show the players the picture of the night hag on page 10 of *Visions of War*.

Oppinimos confronts the heroes just before they reach the gate back to Sigil (or wherever they're going).

Ahead of you stands the gate. In front of it, however, an old crone, withered and feeble, sits incongruously atop a muscular stallion. The steed is as black as midnight on Pan demonium, and it paws at the ground with fiery hooves. From the horse's saddle hang four long, squirming, wormlike creatures with the heads of men.

"Well, well," cackles the decrepit woman, a foul, toothy smile crossing her crooked lips. "Such a band of powerful heroes I've never seen. Off to fight in the Blood War, perhaps? Are you hunting down an artifact made of a luke's hand or eye? Or maybe you're pawns in a plot that you haven't even tumbled to. . . ."

The DM should let the PCs respond however they wish. No matter what they say, Oppinimos won't move aside to let them pass.

"Ah, little pretty ones, here's the point: I know your little plan, and I know who it's going to hurt. My question to you is this: Can you offer me more to keep my bone-hor shut than your enemies will to learn my chant?"

Oppinimos won't be more specific about what she knows. However, she presses the point as much as necessary to make it clear that she *does* know what the PCs are up to, and will sell them out to their enemies (the baatezu and tanar'ri) unless they make her a respectable offer. The hag accepts junk, but it'd have to be a lot to impress her—at least 5,000 gp. She'd rather have magic, particularly a valuable item that she could use.

In any case, if the PCs give her what she wants, Oppinimos gladly moves out of the way. Fact is, she honors the agreement, and won't share her knowledge of their mission with anyone.

On the other hand, if the PCs refuse to make her an offer, or make one that's not to her liking, the hag shrugs.

"I see, then, younglings. I just thought I'd give you first crack." She goods her steed to step back a few paces.

"Be on your way then, and good travels to you." Course, if I were you, I'd expect a visit from the tanar'ri or baatezu in the near future.

Her threats ignored, Oppinimos indeed carries them out, selling her chant first to the tanar'ri, and then to the baatezu. See "Spilling Secrets," below, for more information.

If, at any time, the PCs attack the night hag, the shadow fiend and the gehreleth leap to her defense. The henchmen are quite loyal to Oppinimos, and fight almost to the death for her—almost.

Oppinimos Mar (night hag): AC -1 (ring of protection +1); MV 9; HD 8; hp 48; THACO 13; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6 (bite); SA disease, spell-like powers; SD struck only by silver, cold iron, or +3 or better weapons; MR 65%; SZ M (5' tall); ML average (10); Int exceptional (16); AL NE; XP 13,000.

SA—victim of bite must save vs. poison or contract a disease.

SA—has the following spell-like powers (usable 1/turn unless stated otherwise): *know alignment*, *magic missile* (4 missiles, 5/day), *polymorph self*, *ray of enfeeblement* (3/day), and *sleep* (affects up to 12 HD or levels of evil targets who fail a save vs. spell).

SD—immune to fire, cold, *charm*, *fear*, and *sleep*.

Personality: selfish, controlling, manipulative.

Special Equipment: ring of protection +1 (forged in Sigil), wand of illusion (13 charges), 100-gp gems (8).

Nightmare: AC -4; MV 15, FI 36 (C); HD 6+6; hp 33; THACO 15; #AT 3; Dmg 2d4+2/2d4+2/2d4 (hoof/hoof/bite); SA burning hooves; SD vapor; SZ L (6' at shoulder); ML elite (13); Int very (11); AL NE; XP 2,000.

SA—burning front hooves ignite combustibles.

SD—can breathe a cloud of vapor that inflicts a penalty of -2 to attack and damage rolls of all targets within 10 feet (save vs. paralysis to avoid.)

Asteriav (shadow fiend): AC 9 (in bright light), 5 (in shadow), or 1 (in darkness); MV 12; HD 7+3; hp 29; THACO 13 (in bright light), 12 (in shadow), or 11 (in darkness); #AT 3 or 4 (when jumping); Dmg 1d6/1d6/1d8 (claw/claw/bite) or 1d6x4 (clawx4); SA surprise, spell-like powers; SD darkness, immunities; SW light, turning; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int very (11); AL CE; XP 2,000.

SA—gains surprise if not seen prior to attack; jumps 30' onto surprised victim and makes four attacks.

SA—can use the following spell-like powers: *darkness* 15' radius or *fear* (30' radius) (1/day), and *magic jar* (1/week; if target saves vs. spell, Asteriav is stunned for 1d3 rounds).

SD—90% undetectable in dim light or shadows; damage suffered in darkness is halved; immune to fire, cold, and electricity.

SW—suffers 1d6 points of damage per level of caster if hit with *light* spell; damage suffered in bright light is doubled; can be turned by clerics as "special" undead.

Chaun (gehreleth — farastu): AC -1; MV 15, FI 30 (C); HD 11; hp 51; THACO 9; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6+1/1d6+1/3d4 (claw/claw/bite); SA battle frenzy, spell-like powers; SD adhesive, immunities, infravision 120', +1 or better weapons to hit; MR 50%; SZ M (7' tall); ML champion (15); Int average (8); AL CE; XP 14,000.

SA—reaches battle frenzy (double #AT; all attack rolls at +2 bonus) after six rounds of melee or if reduced to half hit points.

SA—has the following spell-like powers at 11th level: *detect good*, *detect invisibility*, *detect magic*, *dispel magic* (2/day), *ESP*, *fear*, *fog cloud* (3/day), *gate* (1d2 farastu; 40% chance: 1/day), *invisibility*, *tongues*, and *weakness* (reverse of *strength*, 3/day).

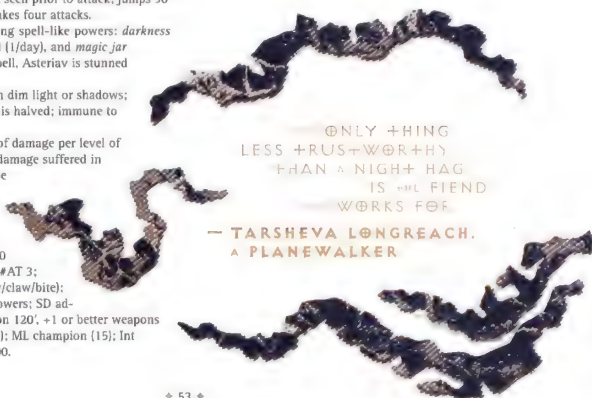
SD—adhesive secretion has 5% chance of holding objects or targets that touch Chaun (Chaun gains +4 bonus to attack rolls against stuck foes; stuck weapons are pulled away from wielder 25% of the time).

SD—immune to acid, poison, *fear*, illusions, and phantasms; half damage from cold and fire.

SPILLING SECRETS

Oppinimos learned from a yugoloth who turned stag that the 'loths purposely leaked chant to the Upper Planes about a creature that controls the fiends' planar travel. She doesn't know what it's all about, but she's kept her eyes peeled nonetheless. And she spied the PCs poking around Daubei's Obscure Woe (she knew the place used to be the kip of an ancient baernaloth).

The night hag figures that the heroes are upper-planar servants out to destroy the mysterious creature. She sells her story to the tanar'ri and the baatezu, and both races of fiends then begin investigating the situation themselves. By the end of the adventure, they'll have tumbled to what's really going on, making the last encounter *much* more dangerous (and exciting).



◆ BACK ⊕ SIGIL ◆

After the audience with Daru Ib Shamiq, the PCs know that they must head for the 348th layer of the Abyss to find the magical *ruulge*. Most likely, they head back to Sigil to rest, regroup, and find a portal to the Abyss. After all, even if they know of another portal to the chaotic plane, it's doubtful that it'll put them anywhere close to the Fortress of Indifference.

If the PCs check with their factions or contacts in Sigil – and garnish the right folks – they can learn the location of a portal that leads to the 348th layer. The doorway lies in the sprawling slum known as the Hive Ward, in a ruined building called the *Darkhouse*.

However, before the PCs can go portal-hopping, they might fall prey to a suspicious fiend.

AN UNWANTED ENCOUNTER

While snooping around in Sigil, Torch, and Daubei's Obscure Woe, the PCs might have inadvertently drawn the attention of a fiend – especially if they've asked the wrong questions, or approached any fiends about their mission. If the DM decides that the PCs haven't been too cautious, the party is secretly followed back to Sigil by one of the following fiends:

- ◆ an erinyes (if the PCs drew the attention of baatezu),
- ◆ a succubus (if they attracted the tanar'ri), or
- ◆ a canoloth (if they attracted the yugoloths).

No matter which fiend follows the heroes, all it really knows is that they hunt something called the Maeldur (which means nothing to it), and it's got something to do with Torch, a powerful yugoloth who lives there, and perhaps the night hags (the fiend saw the party's run-in with Oppinimos Mar). To learn more, the creature tries to kidnap one of the PCs.

The erinyes or succubus waits until one character (preferably male) is alone, then takes the form of a beautiful woman and tries to *charm* him with spells and her natural wiles. If the fiend can't squeeze any chant out of the PC, she spirits him away to a lair in Sigil (most likely in the Hive). She then sends the other heroes a ransom note, demanding to know what they're up to and what they know about the newest fiends' loss of teleportation – In exchange for their friend's life.

If the PCs are trailed by a canoloth, however, the fiend takes a more straightforward approach. It tries to kidnap one of the heroes and bring him to a lair in the Hive, where a hydroloth waits. But as the 'loths try to use force to get the chant out of their prisoner, a strange thing happens: A nycaloth appears in the room and smacks the hydroloth with its mighty fists.

"Fool!" it growls. "You're interfering where you're not wanted!" The hydroloth and canoloth disappear, and the nycaloth tries to put the PC to sleep with its *command* ability. It then returns the prisoner to a place he's familiar with, so that he can easily find the rest of his group upon awakening.

THE REAL PLAN: The ultroloth in charge of the whole plot to dupe the PCs into dunking the Maeldur sent the nycaloth to Sigil. The fiend was ordered to return the kidnapped pawn to the party before the mission fell apart. The nycaloth was told to be subtle about it so the PC wouldn't suspect anything out of the ordinary, but subtlety is lost on most nycaloths. Thus, the PCs are likely to come out of this encounter with an idea that something strange is afoot, something that involves the yugoloths – and perhaps a deception.

Course, no matter whether the PCs are targeted by an erinyes, a succubus, or a canoloth, the very fact that the fiends seem to be looking for answers themselves is a clue that something big's going on.

◆ THE DARKHOUSE ◆

Deep in the Hive Ward of Sigil lie the Slags, the worst part of the city's slums, created long ago during a six-week spillover of the Blood War. One of the larger ruins, a former inn called the *Darkhouse*, contains a portal to the 348th layer of the Abyss. Back when the *Darkhouse* was open for business, the portal saw a lot of activity, especially among tanar'ri. Now only a flock of eyewings inhabits the

If the PCs enter the *Darkhouse*, they're attacked by the flying creatures almost immediately.

Stepping inside the old, crumbling structure, you realize that it was probably a huge and a

one time. The ceilings are high and vaulted, the rooms spacious and, long ago, probably well appointed. But now, dust and cobwebs cover everything – it looks like no one's been here in a long, long time.

At first, all you can smell is the thick concentration of dust in the air. But a stinging, greasy smell quickly works its way into your nostrils, a smell worse than anything the foul air of Sigil alone could ever produce.

Then the sound of something harshly chopping the air can be heard in the next room. A roundish shape suddenly appears in the doorway and hovers, flapping its batlike wings. It stares at you with a single, bloated, bulbous eye that drips with thick mucus.

Most locals avoid the *Darkhouse*, so the eyewings are usually inactive, lying about the ruin listless and bored. Their poisonous tears collect on the floor and harden into a waxy coating, making the entire surface slippery – and dangerous. Unless standing still, anyone in the *Darkhouse* must make a Dexterity check each round or slip and fall. PCs suffer no damage from falling, but contact with the semi-hardened tears inflicts 1d4 points of damage to bare skin. Any PCs with bare hands or faces will touch a tear if they fail their Dexterity check and fall.

Three eyewings fly into the main room of the *Darkhouse* to attack the PCs. Because the creatures have such large wingspans, though, they can attack only singly or in pairs – all three can't gang up on a single victim.

If the PCs defeat the trio and explore the old inn, the DM's free to lay the place out as desired. All the PCs find within are more eyewings – and, in a crumbling doorway, a portal to the Abyss. The party finds the doorway after 4d6 rounds of searching. Planars (or wizards with the *warp sense* spell) might recognize the wooden frame as a portal. But if *warp sense* doesn't reveal the key, the PCs must talk to the "keeper" of the *Darkhouse* (see below).

Eyewing (14): AC 4; MV Fl 24 (B); HD 3; hp 12 each; THACO 17; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d6/1d6/1d4 (claw/claw/tail) or 2d6 (tear); SD infravision 120', immune to cold; SZ L (15' wingspan); ML steady (12); Int low (5); AL LE; XP 650 each.

Notes: Victim hit by tear can save vs. poison for half damage. Splash hits anyone within 10 feet of target (requires attack roll at -2) and causes 2d4 points of damage (save vs. poison for half).

THE KEEPER

The kip's "keeper" is a rogue modron, a knowledgeable cutter who earns jink by selling the chant of portals and keys in the Hive. It fled the gears of Mechanus long ago, and it's decided that its purpose in life is to discover order in the patterns of Sigil's portals. The area most in need of order, naturally, is the Hive, so that's where the rogue focuses its attention. Fact is, it lives in the Slags, not far from the *Darkhouse*, so the PCs should have no trouble finding it.

The keeper looks like a quadrone, though its wings are useless. It's affixed sheets of iron to its cubelike form for added protection, and even bolted on hooks so it would have somewhere to hang its possessions.

Though a member of the Fraternity of Order, the rogue thinks that many Guvners are misguided by trying to exploit the order of the multiverse, rather than serve it. In trying to serve order, though, the modron makes a few mistakes of its own.

First of all, it tries to weave Sigil's cant into its speech, but usually ends up misusing the slang. Further, it makes strange connections between unrelated facts and events. For example, it's "learned" that a slight rainfall means that the Harmonium are 19.8% more likely to scour the Hive for criminals. The modron just doesn't understand the idea of coincidence or chance, instead contending that most bashers simply can't see the cause and effect within the true order of things.

Still, most berks in the Hive respect the rogue for its knowledge and its skill with a sword, and give it no undue trouble. If the PCs hang around outside the *Darkhouse* or actively search the Slags, the keeper eventually approaches them.

A creature approaches you that looks like nothing less than a cube with legs and arms. Fleeshy eyes and lips poke through the front face of its otherwise metal-clad "body." The side panels sport mechanical arms, the bottom panel clockwork legs. Bags and strange-looking odds-and-ends hang from hooks on all of the cube's sides. Over the jangling sound of its movement, the creature speaks:

"Greetings, berkers. Here is the dark chant, so peel your ear boxes. There are 11,996 more bashers on the streets of the Slags today than yesteryear. It follows then that you bionds are in need of a portal key. This one has the key."

If the PCs ask the nature – or cost – of the key, the rogue responds with more of its strange analysis and inappropriate pseudo-cant.

"Sigil's diameter is still smaller than its circumference so you oddle-cubes must give this one the quinish jink. Then this one will give you the barmy key. High-up soddies like you can certainly see that the barbaric-to-githzerai ratio proves that this one is not cross-trading a peel. This one will not give you cutters the laugh. This one will not put you in the bob-hook. Pike those blind thoughts."

After a pause, it adds, almost wearily: "Is that out of the dark? Or do you still think this one a knight of the cross post?"

The keeper finds it perfectly logical to charge 50 gp for the chant on a portal or its key. After all, it needs the jink to continue discovering (or imposing) order. If the PCs pay, the rogue explains that the key to the portal is the *Darkhouse* is one pound of dried eyewing tear. (Eyewings can fly back

and forth through the doorway without activating the portal, because they never have a full pound of dried tears on their bodies.) Further, the modron's convinced that the key is the same for the return trip. That's not true, but neither the keeper nor the PCs have any way of knowing that.

If the PCs engage the rogue in any sort of conversation about the portal, the Abyss, or fiends in general, it offers to sell them a map of the terrain beyond the portal — namely, the 348th layer of the Abyss. The keeper charges another 50 gp for the map. If the PCs pay, the DM should show the players the map on pages 22–23 of *Visions of War*.

The keeper (PI/Ø rogue modron/F9/ Fraternity of Order/LN): AC 5 (modron armor); MV 15; hp 62; THACO 12 (11 with Str, 8 with long sword +3); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8+6 (long sword +3, Str); SD eyesight, magic resistance, saving throw bonus; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (14).

Notes: The keeper inserts bits of the cant into its speech to sound like a native of Sigil, but it sounds phony and forced.

SD—has double the normal range of sight.

SD—has 30% resistance to energy drains and mind-affecting spells (including illusions).

SD—gains +1 to saving throws vs. fire, cold, and acid attacks.

S 18/03 (+1, +3), D 13, C 15, I 12, W 8, Ch 14.

Personality: stiff, mechanical.

Special Equipment: long sword +3 (forged in Sigil), modron armor bolted to body, 345 gp, 230 sp.

◆ TO THE ABYSS ◆

The 348th layer of the Abyss is a frigid, blasted plain of tumbled rocks, jagged pinnacles, and dangerous gorges. No natural life is visible anywhere. The sky's always filled with angry crimson clouds, and the eternal cold creates a layer of dry, powdery frost that stings a traveler's eyes and skin as it's whipped about by the powerful winds.

The 348th was once an important hub of activity, ruled by an Abyssal lord named Thralhavoc. The lord abandoned the dismal layer long ago to focus on more important plots of land, and now the 348th has been all but forgotten by the rest of the plane. Even the name's been lost to time. Most of the tanar'i and other intelligent creatures that live here are exiles, fugitives, and outcasts. They've banded together under Tapheon, a nalfeshnee who rules from a palace called the Fortress of Indifference.

When the PCs pass through the portal in the *Darkhouse*, they emerge on the 348th, in a cluster of caves known as the Whispering Gates.



Whispers all around you are whispers. For a moment, the rustling seems loud, palpable, blocking not just your hearing, but all of your senses. Then, as suddenly as they came, the whispers recede.

You can now see that you're standing in the entrance of a dark cave that opens out onto a

steep cliff side. A dozen or more cave entrances beckon from all sides of the ravine.

The whispers must have been the wind blowing through the weathered rock of the caves. But if that's true, why did

the whispers seem to form words — words too unthinkable to dwell upon, suggestions and temptations too foul to consider?

Truth is, the strong winds of the layer course through the caves and openings in the rock and form sounds like a cacophony of haunting whispers. Sometimes, though, this area actually traps the mutterings of wicked natives of the Abyss, and the wind's continual whine carries the vile words. Those near the caves can't help but hear atrocities of temptation and betrayal in the wind.

Many of the caves in the ravine contain two-way gates that lead to various sites across the planes. Some of the gates are constant, but many shift — on any day, the gates could differ in number, location, and destination.

The guardian of the Whispering Gates, however, does not change — she's a maelephant named Addisranimas.

You barely have time to regain a bit of your bearings when an odd creature emerges from behind a large boulder not far away. Her prodigious frame is covered in black garments adorned with skulls and bones, and she clutches a similarly bedecked staff in one clawed hand. The trunklike nose of her elephantine head is capped with a vicious-looking spike.

She begins moving toward you and raises her trunk. "Who be you, and why be you here?"

When Thralhavoc still ruled the layer, he tricked Addisranimas into guarding the Whispering Gates for all eternity. Unfortunately, she's been corrupted by the seeping waters of the River Styx that collect in a nearby pool (see below). As a result, the normally lawful maelephant has become quite chaotic, and no longer adheres to the letter of her duties.

Fact is, the nalfeshnee Taphoon has plied Addisranimas with flattery, lies, and false promises in order to gain access to the gates. Most of the human slaves and prisoners in the Fortress of Indifference were brought in through the Whispering Gates.

Addisranimas is fascinated with death and the remains of the dead. Her black robes are covered with bones and skulls, and she also carries a long staff similarly adorned with bones (she never uses the staff as a weapon). Occasionally, the slightly barmy maelephant even claims to be a tanar'ri priestess of a power associated with death, such as Kali. She even threatens to cast death-dealing spells and necromantic magic before and during battle. And if a foe is affected by her memory-draining vapors, she tries to convince him that she is indeed a priestess, and he her servant.

The maelephant's supposed to slay any berk who emerges from or tries to use one of the Whispering Gates. But she spares anyone claiming to be associated with a death god. She also looks favorably upon those who offer her a trophy from a slain creature, such as a bone or a skull. Otherwise, she attacks by charging in and fighting to the death (as maelephants usually do).

Addisranimas (maelephant): AC 0; MV 12; HD 8+2; hp 41; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6/2d6 (claw/claw/spike); SA crush, charge, memory loss, spell-like powers; SD never surprised, infravision 240', regenerates 2 hp per round, +1 or better weapons to hit; MR 30%; SZ L (9' tall); ML fearless (20); Int high (14); AL L(C/E); XP 10,000.

SA—if both claw attacks hit, victim is held fast until making a Strength check at –5 or until the maelephant suffers more than 12 points of damage. While held, victim suffers 1d3 points of crushing damage per round and is automatically hit by the trunk spike.

SA—can charge into combat, increasing MV to 18 and gaining +2 to attack rolls during first round of battle.

SA—can breathe a 10'x10'x30' cloud of memory-draining vapor (3/day); victims must save vs. poison or lose all memory (restorable by *neutralize poison*). Victims wearing clothing that covers at least 50% of their bodies gain +2 to the save.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *alarm*, *bind*, *blade barrier* (3/day), *entangle*, *gust of wind*, *light*, *polymorph other* (3/day), *true seeing*, and *warp wood*.

Personality: fixated on death.

THE SEEPING S+YX

If the PCs approach or investigate the area marked "pool of clearest water" on the player map of the layer, read the following:

Drip . . . drip . . . drip. In the Abyss, even a simple trickle of water seems torturous and unrelenting. Drip . . . drip. A wet, rocky overhang high above you drops tears of water into a tiny, clear pool at your feet. Drip . . . drip. At least the water looks clean. Drip . . . drip . . . drip.

Even on this deep layer of the Abyss, the River Styx makes its presence known as it seeps down through the rocks. The river doesn't actually flow through the 348th, but drops of water collect at the tip of a high outcropping of rock (the PCs won't be able to determine where the fluid comes from), and then drip down into a small pool.

The journey through the Abyss has robbed the water of its memory-draining power — but granted it an equally horrible effect. The water's been corrupted by the plane, and it similarly corrupts anyone who drinks from the pool. A mere sip brings out a body's dark, unfettered side, making him chaotic evil in alignment.

Any PC who drinks the water must make a saving throw vs. poison. If he makes the save, the corruption lasts for 1d3x10 rounds. If he fails the save by eight or less, the corruption lasts for 1d6 hours. If he fails the save by more than eight, the corruption lasts until the victim is cured by a *neutralize poison* or *remove curse* spell.

If a PC is affected by the water, the DM should tell the player secretly of the corruption, so the other players won't realize what's happened.

PUNISHMENT FOR THE WICKED

Lurking just outside the Fortress of Indifference is the worst fear of most tanar'ri — a bebilith. No one knows why the spidery creatures attack tanar'ri, but this one has taken it upon itself to destroy the inhabitants of the fortress.

As the party approaches the fortress, they should have no trouble spotting the burrow in which the bebilith lairs; the creature is facing the fortress and concentrating on spinning webs. As soon as the PCs become aware of the bebilith, read the following:

It crouches in a small, web-filled ravine, repulsive jaws clicking in anticipation of a kill. Spidery legs flick about the thing's body, so many wriggling legs — too many to keep track of — with their wicked, blade-like appendages. And — oh, sod-ding bones! Its eyes — its huge, shining eyes — have seen you!

Even though the PCs most likely approached the bebilith from behind or from the side, the creature can't be surprised. It turns and looks at the heroes, deciding to make them its latest victims.

If the PCs flee, the bebilith follows only if it believes it can finish them off quickly — it prefers to focus on the sods in the fortress. If the PCs get away or avoid the monster altogether, in 24 hours it enters the Fortress of Indifference and attacks everything it encounters. If the PCs are inside the fortress at that time, there's a 10% chance per hour (cumulative) that they run into the bebilith.

Bebilith: AC -5; MV 9, Wb 18; HD 12; hp 50; THACO 9; #AT 3; Dmg 2d4/2d4/2d6 (foreleg/foreleg/bite); SA armor destruction, poison; SD webs, protection magic, never surprised, +2 or better weapons to hit; MR 50%; SZ H (15' long); ML champion (15); Int very (11); AL CE; XP 13,000.

SA—if foreleg attack hits, roll 1d6: on 1–2, foe's shield (if any) may be ruined; on 3–6, foe's armor (if any) may be ruined. Nonmagical shields and armor are ruined 40% of the time; magical items reduce that chance by 10% per plus.

SA—victim of bite must save vs. poison at -2 or die in 1d4 rounds; body must be blessed within one turn of death or it disintegrates in flames.

SD—can spin a web (4/day, 60-foot range, covers a 20-foot cube) that acts as web spell, except that it's permanent and burned by fire only 25% of the time.

SD—protection from good/evil (always active); can plane shift to Astral at will (taking one melee-range foe along unless victim makes a save vs. rod/staff/wand).

THE FORTRESS OF INDIFFERENCE

As far as fiendish castles go, the Fortress of Indifference — also known as *Taelac Mirrimbar* — is only a medium-sized structure. It has no outer wall, and the entire keep is a single tower over 200 feet tall. The construction, on the other hand, is quite unique.

The tower's made of a black iron gridwork, with humans, demihumans, and other creatures woven into the metal itself. Diligent care has kept some of the victims alive, but most are dead. Nrr'cc, a chasme priest, animated some of the corpses so they constantly wail and claw at the air. Because of all the bodies — living and dead — *Taelac Mirrimbar* is thick with flies, maggots, and disease.

The foul haven is home to a number of Abyssal denizens who've tried to sever their links with the rest of the plane. The outcasts include half-breed cambions, malformed rutterkin, hated babau, and a handful of nontanar'ri. But just because the berks hate their brethren doesn't mean they're any less wicked — fact is, many are twisted, depraved, and vicious even by Abyssal standards. They just don't want to follow an Abyssal lord or be forced to fight in the Blood War.

Ironically, the very isolation of *Taelac Mirrimbar* made the baatezu peery that the tower's inhabitants were planning a scheme against Baator. In a daring raid supported by yugoloths, humans, tieflings, and a blue dragon, the baatezu recently attacked the fortress and smashed its defenses. Fortunately for the PCs, the fighting's all but over, and the Fortress of Indifference has lost much of its might.

The tower shows clear signs of a horrific battle. Black scorch marks from fires and lightning bolts mar the walls, particularly on the outside. Other areas are completely destroyed, the iron bars of the gridwork bent or broken. The ground's littered with the corpses of those who fell in battle, much to the delight of the flies and maggots that infest the fortress.

A map of the interior of the fortress appears on the inside front cover of this book.

A BROKEN FIEND

The ruler of *Taelac Mirrimbar* is a nalfeshnee named Tapheon who's even more repugnant than most of his kind.

Long ago, Tapheon was horribly maimed in a

battle with a balor that he slighted. His entire body is scarred by long, blackened whip marks, and the wounds

are slightly swollen and red about the edges. Occasionally, they ooze forth a bit of yellow pus.

Even worse, the balor broke Tapheon's back, so now the nalfeshnee stoops and walks with a shambling gait. A brace of rusty black iron barely



holds up his bloated frame, keeping his spine in place with long hooks (the cold iron can pierce his magically strengthened flesh). The wounds have long since scabbed over, partially swallowing the brace into his twisted form. Only one wing sprouts from his back; its mate was cruelly ripped from his body, and Tapheon can no longer fly.

The nalfeshnee now lives the life of a recluse, more concerned with his own personal schemes, twisted desires, and psychotic tendencies than any other "official" activities (including the Blood War) of a tanar'ri of his station. He dwells within *Taelac Mirrimbar* with a few other like-minded fiends and weaklings he can force to do his bidding.

Fact is, he spends most of his time tormenting captured mortals, shaping their flesh to his whims using the *despoiler of flesh* (see below). One of his favorite pastimes is to reshape a slave into the form of a marilith, or, more rarely, a balor. Tapheon then tortures, humiliates, and abuses these "high-up tanar'ri" in revenge for past mistreatment (real or perceived) at their hands.

To get around in the narrower corridors of the fortress, Tapheon uses his *alter self* ability to appear as a 10-foot-tall, beautiful male human. But the magic doesn't hide his horrible stench or raspy voice. Besides, the nalfeshnee no longer gains much solace in appearing pleasant to the eyes of others (so he drops the facade fairly quickly).

In combat, Tapheon relies heavily on his wand, but he also employs his *web*, *feeblemind*, *call lightning* (if outside), *slow* (especially combined with *distance distortion*), and *bind* abilities to good effect. He loves to create giant flies and maggots from those in the fortress and direct them against his enemies. But Tapheon hates direct melee and flees from close combat if possible, usually giving his foes the laugh with *invisibility*, then gaining a better position and resuming ranged magical attacks (like his *nightmare spray*). 'Course, even if he can't get away, his *invisibility* and *mirror image* powers still make him very difficult to harm in melee.



Tapheon (tana'ri — nalfeshnee): AC -8; MV 6 (the hobbles); HD 11; hp 64; THACO 9; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/2d4 (claw/claw/bite); SA *nightmare spray*, spell-like powers; SD never surprised, +2 or better (or iron) weapons to hit; MR 70%; SZ H (20' tall, but stoops to only 12' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int godlike (21); AL CE; XP 18,000.

SA—can use *nightmare spray* (3/day) to release rainbow beams that inflict 15 points of damage on all victims within 60 feet (save vs. spell for half). Victims must then save vs. spell at -2 or wander in a trance for 1d10 rounds in which they see visions of their worst nightmares.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *alter self*, *bind*, *call lightning*, *chill touch*, *darkness* 15' radius, *detect invisibility* (always active), *distance distortion*, *ESP* (always active), *feeblemind*, *forget*, *gate* (1d6 babaus or 1 vrock; 50% chance; 2/day), *giant insect*, *infravision*, *invisibility*, *know alignment* (always active), *mirror image*, *protection from good* (always active), *raise dead*, *slow*, *teleport without error*, and *web*.

Personality: twisted in the extreme, even for a tana'ri.

Special Equipment: the *despoiler of flesh* (34 charges; see below).

THE DESPOILER OF FLESH

Tapheon's favorite possession is a thoroughly evil wand called the *despoiler of flesh* or, simply, the *flesh wand*. This magical item is 3 feet long (it's a rod to human-sized creatures), and it's fashioned from tongues that have been sewn together but still drip with saliva.

When the disgusting wand is used, its tongues wrap around the wielder's hand and upper arm (in Tapheon's case, only 1 foot of the wand actually protrudes from his grip). The *despoiler of flesh* lets the wielder reshape any living or dead flesh within 25 feet. The user can alter any creature — or any part of a creature — to a new shape limited only by imagination.

The change is usually merely cosmetic, and the target's mass remains basically the same. A target reshaped into a more pleasing form gains a maximum of 2 points of Charisma, but a berk's Charisma can plummet all the way to 3 if he's turned into a less pleasing shape. As a general rule, physical forms are never actually improved (except perhaps in appearance), but they can be worsened.

Thus, a human who receives a huge set of mandibles or claws doesn't gain the attack forms of those body parts. Likewise, reshaped wings don't allow flight, huge muscles add no Strength, fins can't help with swimming, and so on. Under no circumstances can the *flesh wand* bestow magical abilities such as a breath weapon or innate spell-like powers.

However, if a target's legs are reshaped into a snakelike tail, the victim can only slither — he can't walk. Hands shaped into stumps can't hold weapons, and a face reshaped without eyes can't see.

There is one good thing about the *despoiler of flesh*, though — it can't be used to slay its targets by reshaping

them. Victims are always altered so they can survive in their new forms.

At the start of "Squaring the Circle," the wand has 34 charges, though Tapheon (or any tana'ri) can add charges by sewing more tongues onto the wand — one charge per tongue. It takes one charge to reshape the flesh of creatures man-sized or smaller, two charges for large creatures, and three charges for creatures considered huge or gargantuan. However, it takes only one charge to reshape a man-sized or smaller amount of flesh (like an arm) on a bigger creature.

The *despoiler of flesh* can affect one target each round. Changes made by the wand normally last 1d6x10 rounds. However, if the wielder expends twice the number of charges on a reshaping, the new form is permanent (though polymorph other can restore a creature's original form).

Tapheon sought out the magical wand in order to repair his marred form. Unfortunately, his lust for power drove him to reshape the flesh of his slaves first. When he tried the wand on himself, he discovered that it didn't work — anyone who uses its magic on another can never wield the power to reshape himself in any way. Likewise, those who've been reshaped by the *despoiler of flesh* — even temporarily — can never call upon its power.

The nalfeshnee had his slaves build *Taelac Mirrimbar* to capitalize on the power of the wand, using the item to far more twisted ends than even its unknown creators could have intended. Tapheon planned to construct a tower entirely of living bodies that he could reshape at will — a place where the *flesh wand* would make him all-powerful. The Fortress of Indifference isn't exactly what he had in mind, but it's close.

WALLS OF CAPTIVITY

As per Tapheon's heinous orders, living creatures — mostly sods captured from Sigil or the Prime Material Plane — were incorporated into the walls, floors, and ceilings of the fortress. The victims are held in place by manaclelike bonds, but even if they could break free, they'd have nowhere to go. The structure's iron gridwork was literally built around them, and an elaborate mesh of razor-sharp wire provides an added barrier. If someone tries to free a slave from a wall, the wires might slice the captive to ribbons.

Thus, removing a captive requires not only a force capable of breaking the wall supports and bonds, but a successful remove traps roll (to avoid the wire). 'Course, a PC could use teleportation or other magical means, but few parties'll have the power to free all of the captives restrained in *Taelac Mirrimbar*.

When the fortress was built, it held almost 10,000 slaves, but many have since died (some in the recent baatezu attack). Only about 3,000 captives are currently alive, and they're found mostly in the upper levels of the structure.

Tapheon uses his *raise dead* ability to bring a few sods back from time to time, but a chasme priest named Nrr'cc

has animated a number of the dead. The resulting skeletons and zombies were partially freed from their bonds so they could claw and thrash at intruders. Nn'cc fell in the baatezu attack, but his creations "live" on, wailing horribly at all times. They can't be turned, and they strike at anything that moves near them. The skulls on the map show the locations of undead captives; PCs who pass by the areas encounter 1d4 skeletons or zombies.

As the PCs travel through *Taelac Mirrimbar*, only 1 out of every 20 captives encountered are still alive and not yet insane. These few sods can still be reasoned with. However, they've seen very little (after all, they can't turn their heads), and they can't give the PCs any chant about the fortress other than what's right in front of them. Most plead for release, and all have been trapped for more years than they can remember.

Tapheon uses the captives both as playthings for his cruel whims and as a last-ditch defense. If an enemy invades his tower, the nalfeshnee uses his always-active ESP power to pluck the image of a loved one from the invader's mind. Then, he uses the *despoiler of flesh* to reshape a captive into that form. The trick often provides a valuable distraction, especially when the captive's in a wall or door that the invader's trying to break down.

A canny basher might peer through the spaces in the gridwork to see the area beyond. But *Taelac Mirrimbar* is a place of shadows and tricks of the eye. Even with a strong light, looking through a hole in a wall, ceiling, or floor reveals only a shadowy representation of what lies beyond. And any PC who listens through the holes in the gridwork hears only the screams (far or near) of still-living captives — or worse yet, their mad, raving whispers.

It's tricky to walk on the floors of the fortress, too. They're not smooth, level planes — they're made of iron bars and fleshy prisoners. While in *Taelac Mirrimbar*, each PC moves at only half his normal speed (it's difficult, physically and morally, to walk on living or dead slaves). However, a PC can make a Dexterity check each turn to move faster. Success means that he moves at his normal speed for that turn, but failure means that he falls and suffers 1d3 points of damage.

Footing's even more treacherous during battle. In every other round of combat, each PC must make a Dexterity check or trip and lose a round of activity as he recovers (though he suffers no damage).

OTHER DETAILS

Every door in the Fortress of Indifference has a captive trapped within it. Half of the sods are still alive; those who've passed on are undead if they're next to a skull on the map.

Every door in the fortress is magically barred so that it can be opened only by a tanar'ri (though a tielfling of definite tanar'ri heritage has a 25% chance of opening a door). A *dispel magic* spell breaks the enchantment and allows the door to be opened normally. But unless the PCs have a lucky tielfling or can cast *dispel magic* over and over, they must resort to forcing the doors open with strength or weapons. Doing so kills any living prisoner trapped in a door.

But not all doors are closed; the map shows which are shut and which are ajar. If a door's open simply because a fiend forgot to close it, there's a 50% chance that the captive within is still alive. However, if a door was forced open in the recent battle, the prisoner is definitely dead. In either case, the PCs have no problem passing through an open doorway.

Scaling the interior gridwork walls of *Taelac Mirrimbar* is fairly easy. Thieves add 30% to their climb wall rolls, and even unskilled climbers have a flat 70% chance of success. But the taut wires around the iron spell danger. Any climber who fails his roll not only falls, but also suffers 1d6 points of damage from slashes and cuts.

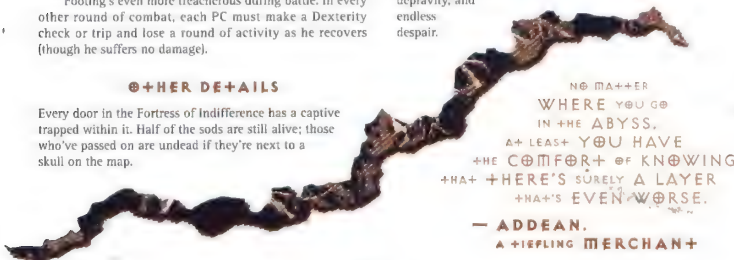
On the outside of the fortress, the fiends hid numerous traps so that spikes, wires, and barbs spring forth to foil climbers. Each climber has a 30% chance (per round of climbing) of disturbing a trap and suffering 1d4x1d6 points of damage.

Due to the vast numbers of festering corpses, biting insects, and inhuman conditions, each PC who enters the fortress has a 75% chance of contracting a dreadful disease. (Any PC who spends more than 24 hours in the fortress automatically contracts a disease.) One-fourth of these diseases are fatal unless cured within 1d4 weeks. The other 75% are debilitating and disfiguring unless cured within 2d4 weeks.

All ceilings in *Taelac Mirrimbar* are 30 feet high to accommodate some of the gigantic residents.

Unless noted otherwise, the fortress has no light sources. The PCs must provide their own.

Finally, some DMs may wish to require one or more Wisdom checks to make sure that the PCs keep their sanity in this place of revolting horror, depravity, and endless despair.

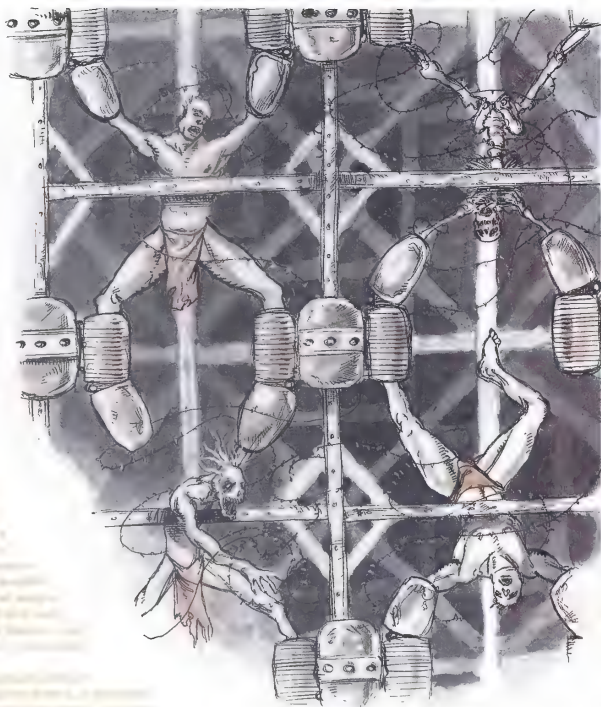


N0 MA++ER
WHERE Y0U G0
IN +HE ABYSS,
A+ LEAS+ YOU HAVE
+HE COMFOR+ 0F KNOWING
+HA+ +HERE'S SURELY A LAYER
+HA++ EVEN+W0RSE.
— ADDEAN.
A +TIEFLING MERCHANT+

SHOWING THE FORTRESS

As the PCs approach Taelac Mirrimbar, show the players the picture of the Fortress of Indifference on page 11 of Visions of War.

Read the following:



The damage suffered by the tower during the recent battle is visible within 200 yards.

Any PC who examines the corpses around the fortress should make an Intelligence check. If he succeeds, he notices that the bodies are mostly yugoloths, tieflings, and humans. If he makes another Intelligence check, he realizes that the

deadens were most likely a mercenary force in the Blood War.

Fact is, the front doors to the fortress still hang partly open and off their hinges, apparently having been forced open. But if the PCs don't want to enter through the front doors, they can try to reach the balconies on the third level or the hole in the wall on the fourth level. However, either option means that the PCs must be able to fly (if they have the magic) or climb (if they can deal with the traps).

Tapheon waits on the platform in the upper level of the fortress. If the PCs try to reach that level from the outside, the nalfeshnee uses his *call lightning* ability on the attackers.



COMMON ROOMS

The first three levels of the fortress contain numerous storerooms, personal quarters, and armories. These chambers are marked on the map and are more or less the same throughout:

STOREROOM. Simple rooms with simple functions, each chamber hold racks of torture implements; bins of coal; barrels of oil, water, or wine; haunches of meat (usually rotting and insect-ridden) hanging on hooks; rope and wire; tools; bundles of cloth; and other common items. In most storerooms, it's obvious that the supplies were stolen from other planes — the craftsmanship is clearly not Abyssal.

ARMORY. Each armory is filled with 1d100+10 weapons of all types, including melee weapons, ranged weapons, and weapons that the PCs have never laid eyes on before. Only 1 out of every 100 weapons is magical, gaining a +1 bonus while in the Abyss.

QUARTERS. The quarters are starkly appointed, often kept more for appearances than actual use. Larger rooms housed dretches (packed in as tightly as possible), and contain nothing now but the creatures' foul stench. Smaller rooms — the former homes of babaus, cambions, rutterkin, bulezau, and a hezrou or two — still hold a few items. There, the PCs can find scraps of food, broken furniture, trophies (severed heads, baatezu weapons, etc.), and 1d100 gp worth of gold or silver objects (gems, jewelry, and the like).

THE GROUND LEVEL

This level saw the most fighting in the recent battle. Not only were the main gates forced open, but a nycaloth ripped open a large hole in the wall and left a path of destruction in his wake (he had no desire to even try the doors). Bodies and carnage are thick, with corpses of dretches, vrock, chasme, rutterkin, mezzoloths, dergholoths, humans, and tieflings strewn about.

No matter how the PCs gain entrance to the level, they experience the following:

Bodies and gore are everywhere. Even the prisoners trapped within the rusting gridwork of the walls, floor, and ceiling have long since died. The captives hang limply, held in place only by their cruel bonds.

The flies are so thick here that it's hard to speak or even breathe without getting them in your mouth. Maggots squirm through the carnage all around you. From far off, yet in every direction, you hear the sobs of the wounded and the gibbering of madmen. Many of the prisoners are not so fortunate as to be dead.

All chambers on the ground level were used as storerooms, armories, or personal quarters. However, like most tanar'ri citadels, the layout and organization is chaotic and impractical.

RANDOM ENCOUNTER: BODAK

Though not marked on the map, one other sod roams the ground level, and may encounter the PCs at random: a newly created bodak.

The grotesque monster used to be a sorcerer named Serrant. An evil berk who worked for the tanar'ri, he just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Serrant and his raven familiar died when the baatezu attacked *Taelac Mirrimbar*, and the conditions were just right to turn him into a bodak (who can tumble to the strange energies and chaotic quirks of the Abyss?).

Unfortunately, Serrant is so new a bodak that he doesn't realize he's dead. He's started to figure out that something terrible has happened to him, but he doesn't know what. He recently found his raven, but accidentally killed it by making eye contact (bodaks have a death gaze). A bit confused, Serrant tied the dead bird to his arm with wire so it'd stay with him until it "got better." The bodak clutches a broken (and useless) wand in his hand, brandishing it if threatened.

When the PCs meet Serrant, show the players the picture of the bodak on page 12 of Visions of War.

Read the following:

Shambling toward you from the shadows is a convulsing, misshapen, gray-skinned figure. Tattered rags hang from a body that seems to shrivel as you watch. A maggot-ridden bird, stiff in death, has been lashed to the creature's arm in a sickly comical perch. In his other hand, he clutches a thin stick that might be a wand.

The monster's mucus-filled gibbering is virtually unintelligible until he sees you. Then his slurred speech slowly forms words: "Help . . . me . . . please."

Serrant still retains some memory from his former life, but it's fading fast. In this transitory state, he's completely barmy and refuses to accept his new existence. The bodak approaches the PCs seeking refuge and aid, but has no control over his death-dealing gaze.

Many of the captives trapped in the structure of the fortress have died from Serrant's gaze. Any PC who makes a Wisdom check realizes that berks slain in the Abyss by a bodak become bodaks themselves. Thus, the party can expect that, within 24 hours, the ground level will have bodaks throughout, though the new creatures will still be trapped in the walls and floors. Note that bodaks can't open any of the closed doors either — they're not tanar'ri.

Serrant (bodak): AC 5; MV 6; HD 9+9; hp 67; THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (fists); SA death gaze; SD infravision 180', immunities, cold iron or +1 weapons to hit; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); Int low (5); AL CE; XP 5,000.

SA—any creature that meets the bodak's gaze (within 30 feet) must save vs. petrification or die.

SD—half damage from cold, gas, and magical fire; immune to electricity, nonmagical fire, and poison, as well as *charm, hold, sleep, and slow* spells.

Personality: confused, volatile.

Special Equipment: broken wand, gold bracelet (worth 200 gp).

I. ENTRY ROOM

This is a large chamber filled with bodies. A careful examination of the corpses reveals that most fell in battle, while a few are much older than the others and are partially eaten. (The half-eaten bodies were tossed down by the vrock that lived in the roost directly above; for details, see "The Vrock Roost," below.)

When the PCs enter the room, they notice the condition of the main doors:

Broken corpses lie all about the front doors, which simply hang open, obviously forced apart by something with great strength.

The body of the nycaloth that tore through the fortress lies in the center of the room, brought down by powerful magical arrows and vrock claws. Fact is, a dead vrock lies underneath the massive yugoloth, its talons still clutched about the nycaloth's head.

In one hand, the nycaloth still maintains an incredibly strong grip on a huge battle-axe. Forged on the Astral Plane, the axe is +4 in the silver vord, but only +3 in the Abyss. However, if the PCs try to pry the weapon from the nycaloth's grip, they're attacked by vorrs that hide in the shadows near the staircase.

The stairs that ascend to the second level aren't made of the captive-filled gridwork, but rather a black stone that absorbs most of the surrounding light. Thus, it's hard to see the individual stairs well enough to climb them, and creatures lurking near the staircase — like the vorrs — gain 40% to their chance to hide in shadows.

Though the hyenalike creatures are particularly cowardly, they've been commanded by their pack's shaman to bring back a magical item. Thus, they attack the party to defend the nycaloth's battle-axe.

Vorr (8): AC 6; MV 15; HD 3+4; hp 18 each; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/2d4 (claw/claw/bite); SA knockdown, leap; SD shadow form; SZ M (5' long); ML average (8); Int low (5); AL CE; XP 420 each.

SA—if bite attack hits by more than 4, victim must make Strength check or be knocked down; victim then suf-

fers -4 on attack rolls (and is attacked with +4 to hit) until he spends one round regaining his feet.

SA—leaps on a surprised foe and attacks as a backstab with a +4 attack bonus, inflicting 4d4 damage.

SD—can take shadow form (1/day, duration 10 minutes), becoming immune to physical harm and 90% invisible (75% if moving); *light* or *continual light* forces vorr out of shadow form and blinds it for 1d3 rounds (no saving throw).

Thief Abilities: MS 60, HS 50 (90 by stairs).

II. THE VROCK ROOST

Rising above the open staircase is a tall shaft that doesn't actually fit into the layout of the fortress. The space is created by the warping nature of this layer of the Abyss, and it can be seen only by those in this room.

The shaft is oval-shaped — roughly 60 feet by 75 feet — and it extends upward for 100 feet to an area where large, long iron hooks stick out of the gridwork ceiling and walls. A murder of vrock once perched on the hooks, but now only one fiend, Arrikk, remains. He still nurses wounds from the recent battle — as well as a growing hatred for Tapheon.

The most likely way for the PCs to encounter Arrikk is to go up to the roost. Climbing the walls is just as easy as anywhere else in the fortress. But unless a climber has curved talons like a vrock, he must make a Dexterity check to stand on one of the hooks. Further, any PC who tries to fight while standing on a hook must make a Dexterity check at -2. If the PC fails a check, either he falls to the ground and suffers 10d6 points of damage (75% chance), or he's impaled by a hook and suffers 3d6 points of damage (25% chance).

If the PCs reach the roost by climbing, flying, or any other means, read:

It seems impossible for the shaft to exist here, but it does. Fact is, it reaches much higher than the stairs, ending about one hundred feet off the floor. At the top of the shaft, long, rusty iron hooks stick out of the walls and ceiling. Perched atop one hook is a feathered monstrosity more terrible than any mere bird. A mockery of a hybrid between a human and a vulture, the creature watches you curiously, a long tongue darting from its beak to lick its festering wounds.

During the attack on the fortress, the vrock defended the ground level, but Tapheon fled to safety and left them to fight and die. Arrikk was severely wounded in the battle, but in the end he helped to drive off the invaders. He also spied Tapheon give his fellows the laugh. Thus, if Arrikk encounters the PCs, the vrock tries to use his *mass charm* ability to befriend the heroes and send them against Tapheon.

If the PCs describe the *vulture*, Arrikk identifies it as the headpiece of Tapheon's "throne." Like the nalfeshnee, however, Arrikk has no idea that the item has important magical powers — though he's quite intrigued if the PCs spill the dark of it.

If the PCs don't visit the roost, Arrikk may later encounter them at a random spot in the fortress (25% chance per hour). If the heroes refuse to help him destroy Tapheon, he attacks them.

Arrikk (tanar'ri — vroek): AC -5; MV 12, Fl 18 (C); HD 8; hp 39 (normally 58); THACO 13; #AT 5; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d8/1d8/1d6 (claw×4/beak); SA spores, screech, first attack, spell-like powers; SD never surprised, infravision 120', +2 or better weapons to hit; MR 70%; SZ L (8' tall); ML fanatic (18); Int high (14); AL CE; XP 19,000.

SA—once every three rounds, can spray spores that inflict 1d8 points of damage on all within 5 feet; spores grow under victim's skin, inflicting 1d2 points of damage per round for 10 rounds, at which time victim is covered with vinelike growths. Holy water, *bless*, *neutralize poison*, or similar magic kills the spores; *slow poison* stops the growth.

SA—once per battle, can screech and deafen all within 30 feet; victims must make a Constitution check or be stunned for one round.

SA—always attacks first in melee.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *darkness* 15' radius, *detect invisibility*, *detect magic*, *dispel magic*, *gate* (2d10 manes, 1d6 bar-igura, or 1 nalfeshnee; 50% chance; 1/day), *infravision*, *mass charm*, *mirror image*, *telekinesis*, and *teleport without error*.

Personality: crafty, bitter.

THE SECOND LEVEL

If the PCs climb the stairs from the entry room to the second level, read:

The black stairs take you up to the next level of the fortress, but not completely out of the carnage — both stair and landing are covered with fallen warriors and fiends. Atop the landing stands a huge iron sculpture of a winged celestial impaled on a long, fiend-headed spike.

At the top of the stairs is a large opening to the floor below, surrounded by a long gallery of slag. It looks like a row of iron sculptures that've been melted by an incredibly hot fire.

This level saw little fighting in the recent battle. Most of the rooms were used as personal quarters or storerooms (see above for details). The other rooms on the second level are as follows:

2. GALLERY

During the battle for *Taelac Mirrimbar*, an exploding fireball turned the gallery's iron sculptures to slag. The works had depicted horrifying acts of violence and brutality, and it's best that they're now destroyed.

3. LANDING

Here stands an iron sculpture of a planetar impaled on a huge, fiend-headed spike. When the PCs reach this point, they hear for the first time the maniacal howling of Jeddac (see below), which issues forth from his room.

4. JEDDIAC

Jeddac was one of the captives trapped in a wall on the ground level of the fortress. For some reason, when his section of wall was destroyed in the battle, he wasn't sent to the dead-book, but freed. Unfortunately, the sod's hopelessly barmy. He randomly titters, screams, or just sits quietly.

When the PCs first encounter Jeddac, he's staging a conversation between two severed heads that he wears over his hands like puppets.

Ahead you see a rag-clad human, gaunt as a living skeleton, with the severed head of a succubus in one hand and the horned head of a bariaur in the other. Then you realize that he's wearing the heads over his hands, as if they were grisly gloves. The man stares at you with wide, wild eyes, and quakes.

Look, Daehn," he says, moving the succubus's head like a puppet. "More friends to come and play." The man then turns to the bariaur head, and makes it respond. "That's great, Jyien!"

The barmy seems darkly comical, but there's really nothing funny about him. Fact is, if ignored, Jeddac turns hostile and attacks the nearest PC in a fit of inappropriate rage. But the sod's a victim, not a threat. The PCs must figure out what to do with him; good-aligned folks should try to help him.

Jeddac's wounded from all he's been through, and prolonged torture has permanently reduced many of his statistics. In his few moments of lucidity, he might reveal some important chant, such as:

WHY'RE YOU LOOKING FOR
BIG BOAR-MAN, JYIEN?
— JEDDIAC

"BECAUSE
— "JYIEN"



- ◆ Like all of the other captives, he's been in the fortress since it was first built. They were kept alive by the magic of a giant insect-man (Jeddiac doesn't know it was the chasme priest, Nrr'cc) so they could be tortured, maltreated, and "reshaped" (Jeddiac won't explain further).
- ◆ The recent attack caught the tanar'i off-guard. The fiends in the fortress were outcasts and exiles — they wanted nothing to do with the Blood War.
- ◆ The master of the fortress is a huge, fat, stooped-over boar-creature with a long tongue coming out of his hand.
- ◆ Most folks who lived in the fortress are now dead.

Jeddiac (Pl/♂ male/F3/N): AC 10 (none); MV 12; hp 6 (normally 15); THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SZ M (5' tall); ML average (9).

S 9, D 10, C 7, I 13, W 3, Ch 3.

Personality: completely insane.

5. NABASSU

A mature nabassu that survived the attack on the fortress now rests in its lair on the second level. To ensure its privacy, it created a trap to keep intruders away. If anyone steps in the 10-foot-square section of floor in front of the door to the outer lair, 1d4 hidden spikes spring up out of the floor's iron gridwork. Each PC in the area must make a Dexterity check or suffer 1d6 points of damage from the one-foot-long spikes.

Some time ago, the nabassu turned away from tormenting mortals (the province of younger nabassu), and focused its dread attentions on creatures of the Upper Planes. In the outer lair, the fiend has put its latest obsession on display: a cervid guardinal kidnapped from Elysium. The satyrlike cutter's spiked to the wall, long since dead. It clearly suffered terrible torture before passing on.

This is a place of great pain. Spiked cruelly and crudely to the far wall is the corpse of a slender creature of noble face. Bloodstained brown fur adorns scarred flesh that once might have been golden. Antlers sprout from its bruised yet regal brow, and tiny hooves hang limply from dangling legs. Long knives and other wicked tools — covered in dried blood — lie strewn about the room.

The nabassu has covered the walls, floors, and ceiling of its inner lair with black drapery to further ensure its privacy. Black tallow candles in tall, black iron candlesticks light the room with a dim, eerie light, and the fiend rests in dark meditation.

The tanar'i wants to be left alone. If it hears the floor-trap activate, it summons ghasts to distract the intruders. If that doesn't work, the nabassu fights until the PCs leave, teleporting away if in serious danger.

Nabassu (mature): AC -5; MV 12, Fl 15 (C); HD 7+20; hp 56; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 2d4/2d4/3d4 (claw/claw/bite); SA paralyzation, spell-like powers; SD summon ghasts, become *ethereal*, +1 or better weapons (or cold iron) to hit; MR 50%; SZ M (7' tall); ML champion (15); Int high (14); AL CE; XP 16,000.

SA—all creatures within 10 feet must save vs. paralyzation or be paralyzed for 1d10 rounds (usable once per encounter).

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *darkness* 15' radius, *energy drain* (by touch), *gate* (2d10 manes, 1d4+1 cambions, or 1 mature nabassu; 45% chance; 3/day), *infravision*, *regenerate* (1 hp per hour), *silence* 15' radius, *teleport without error*, and *vampiric touch*.

SD—while in the Abyss, can automatically summon 1d4+1 ghasts (1/day).

SD—can become *ethereal* at will (2/day).

Personality: surly, reclusive.

Special Equipment: *singing skull* (once per day, this item can rise up on command and belch a mournful kean; all within hearing range must save vs. spell or be affected as a *fear* spell).

THE THIRD LEVEL

The mercenary attack reached the balconies of this level, as well as the room full of rubble (room 11), where a nycaloth and a few hydroloths ripped their way through the ceiling.

Observant PCs (those who make successful Intelligence checks) notice that some of the prisoners trapped within the structure of this level have been mutated or physically altered in some way. They retain their basic humanoid forms, but their facial features have melted, their fingers have taken the shapes of squirming worms, and so on. Naturally, Tapheon used the *despoiler of flesh* on the sods; the PCs might pick up on the clue and begin to suspect what lies ahead.

RANDOM ENCOUNTER: BABAU

Currently, two babaus wander this level, though they have personal quarters on the second floor. The fiends are surveying *Taelac Mirrimbar* for damage and searching for other survivors. The babaus can be encountered anywhere on the level, alone or together, as the DM wishes. They're hard to surprise, so if they choose to fight the PCs, they most likely begin with an ambush and a backstabbing attack.

Babau (2): AC -3; MV 15; HD 8+14; hp 57, 44; THACO 11 (8 with Str, 7 with *long sword* +1); #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d4+1/1d4+1/2d4 (claw/claw/horn) or 1d8+8 (*long sword* +1, Str); SA corrosion, gaze, spell-like powers; SD jelly, +1 or better weapons to hit; MR 50%; SZ M (7' tall); ML champion (15); Int genius (17); AL CE; XP 17,000 each.

Notes: The babaus have Strength 19 (+3, +7).

SA—skin jelly has a 20% chance per hit of corroding metal weapons (ordinary weapons must save vs. acid or be destroyed; magical weapons must save or lose one plus); jelly burns exposed flesh for 1d6 points of damage.

SA—one target per round who meets gaze (within 20 feet) must save vs. spell or be affected as by a *ray of enfeeblement* (usable in addition to other attacks).

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *darkness* 15' radius, *dispel magic*, *fear*, *fly*, *gate* (1d6 cambions or 1 babau; 40% chance; 1/day), *heat metal*, *infravision*, *levitate*, *polymorph self*, and *teleport without error*.

SD—skin jelly halves damage from slashing and piercing weapons (Type S and P).

Personality: curious, foul-tempered.

Special Equipment: each babau carries a *long sword* +1 (forged in the Abyss).

Thief Abilities: PP 30, OL 30, F/RT 25, MS 95, HS 80, DN 35, CW 90, RL 30, backstab×4.

6. BALCONIES

Both balconies on the third level were involved in the battle, as tanar'ri poured holy water onto hydroloths that tried to glide into the fortress. The liquid's stolen, of course — Tapheon and others spent years collecting the dangerous water. Fact is, several vats are still full of holy water, though one lies on its side, empty.

A few corpses lie on the balconies: a nabassu and several hydroloths and chasme. But in each balcony area, the PCs find 12 manes, who've reformed after being slain in the battle and now await further orders. The manes attack any nontanar'ri that enter the rooms.

Manes (12 per room): AC 8; MV 6; HD 1; hp 4 each; THAC0 20; #AT 3; Dmg 1d2/1d2/1d4 (claw/claw/bite); SA acidic vapor, spell-like powers; SD reformation, immune to mind-affecting spells; MR 100%; SZ S (3' tall); ML never checked; Int semi (3); AL CE; XP 975 each.

SA—when slain, dissipates into a cloud of acidic vapor; all within 10 feet must save vs. poison or suffer 1d6 points of damage.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *darkness* 15' radius, *infravision*, and *teleport without error*.

SD—"dead" manes reforms from vapor in 24 hours.

7. REFECTORY

When the PCs enter this room, read:

You're greeted with a ghastly sight — the dining hall of the tanar'ri. The grisly remains of humans and humanoids lie scattered about three long tables and a number of benches. Blood covers everything in the room, including the captives — some dead, some alive — bound in the walls. Apparently, they were forced to witness the horrors here.

8. UNHOLY SHRINE

This room is a shrine dedicated to the evil deity Vaprak the Destroyer; a tapestry hanging over the altar depicts the god in the form of a mottled brown and green ogre. The shrine was built and attended by Nrr'cc, the chasme priest slain in the recent battle. Though Tapheon wanted *Taelac Mirrimbar* to remain free of outside influences (including powers), he enjoyed Nrr'cc's twisted and demented spells, and thus allowed the temple to exist.

This shrine is gaudily decorated in brilliant red tapestries and carpets. A cylindrical altar stands in the corner furthest from the doors. The altar was carved from a deep green stone, though its color has been stained by the blood of hundreds, if not thousands, of living beings killed upon it.

Surprisingly, the room is filled with a pleasant, soothing music that emanates from the walls and floors.

Though the low, deep music is strangely calming, it's a trap. Any PCs who hear the music must make a saving throw vs. spell. Those who fail are caught up in a horrible reverie in which they see themselves as one of the captives brought here long ago and built into the walls of the fortress. The heroes see and feel things both terrible and terrifying. None of it is real, and the sods suffer no damage, but the visions haunt them until the magic is somehow dispelled.

Note that *detect magic* reveals the enchanted nature of the music.

I STAND CORRECTED.

— ADDEAN, AFTER SURVEYING THE FORTRESS OF INDIFFERENCE



9. SANCUM

This small room was Nrr'cc's abode. It's a filthy place of blood and excrement, but it also contains a locked metal trunk coated with Type M contact poison (onset time: 1d4 minutes; inflicts 5 or 20 points of damage).

If the PCs open the trunk, they find a *book of vile darkness*, two potions of Type J poison, and a silk bag containing 10 gems (each is worth 100 gp).

10. WORKROOM

In this chamber, the chasme priest Nrr'cc was trying to create a clay golem. The construct stands, unfinished, in the

center of the room, surrounded by wooden tables covered with tools and alchemical equipment.

11. RUBBLE-FILLED ROOM

When yugoloth mercenaries invaded the fourth level of the fortress, they tore a hole in the floor and came down into this room. The chamber's still filled with broken heaps of iron, as well as a few bodies of captives who died when the 'loths burst through the gridwork. Four dead dretches also lie among the debris, and several more fester in the nearby rooms.

12. STAIRS DOWN

The yugoloths who tore their way down through the ceiling in room 11 met their end here. A nycaloth and three hydroloths lie near the top of the spiral stairs, along with the bodies of their foes — two habaus and five chasme.

13. STAIRS UP

This staircase leads up to the fourth level of the fortress. The stairs are carved with intricate runes that change into new patterns as the PCs set foot on each step. The meaning of the runes has been lost to time, along with any power they once might have had. The carvings pose no threat, though the party's likely to step cautiously.

THE FOURTH LEVEL

On this level, the tanar'ri kept the slaves that weren't built into the structure of the fortress. The area suffered much during the recent assault; it was attacked by a blue dragon, a nycaloth, and a number of hydroloths. The mercenaries invaded *Taelac Mirrimbar* by tearing a gaping hole in the outer wall, and the subsequent fighting left many rooms in ruins.

Most of the slaves on the fourth level — both within and without the walls — are dead. As with the sods on the third level, many have been physically altered by Tapheon's *flesh wand*. Any PC who makes an Intelligence check with a +2 bonus realizes that the number of "mutated" prisoners has grown (a clue that they're getting closer to the nalafeshnee).

Other than the corpses of prisoners and tanar'ri, the PCs find little in the rooms of this level. However, eight human slaves (all primes or planars) survived the battle and still cower in various locations. Six of the berks are completely barmy and do nothing to communicate intelligibly. The other two are scared and peery, but they still have their wits about them and would greatly appreciate being led to safety.

Slave (Pl,Pr/var human/0-level/var) (8): AC 10 (none); MV 12; hp 2; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1 (fists); SZ M (5' tall); ML unsteady (5); Int average (10).

Personality: virtually catatonic or merely terrified.

14. "MARILITH"

This chamber is the home of a human slave named Triava who's been reshaped by Tapheon to look like a powerful marilith. Through magic and psychological conditioning, Tapheon's made the woman believe that she truly is a marilith. 'Course, because she's not really a tanar'ri, she can't even open the door to her own room, and so remains locked in the small chamber. If the PCs enter, she attacks them as intruders into her "domain."

Triava is one of Tapheon's favorite slaves, and he's disturbingly amused by her actions as a marilith. Fact is, he's given her *potions of super-heroism* and *speed* to drink if she ever needs to fight in her tanar'ri guise. If she battles the PCs, she drinks both potions without a second thought; the DM should consult Table 111 (Potion Compatibility) in Appendix 2 of the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* (note that Triava's statistics may change as well).

Triava (Pl/♀ human/F3/CE): AC 10 (none); MV 6 (12 with *potion of speed*); hp 23 (48 with *potion of super-heroism*); THACO 18 (13 with *super-heroism*); #AT 1, 3/2 (with *super-heroism*) or 2 (with *speed*); Dmg 1d6+1 (short sword, Str); SZ M (7' tall); ML champion (16); Int average (9); XP 120.

Notes: Triava has been reshaped to resemble a marilith. However, four of her six arms wave uselessly, holding weapons but unable to strike (the *despoiler of flesh* can't grant beneficial changes).

S 16 (+1 dmg), D 12, C 15, I 10, W 6, Ch 3.

Personality: deranged, confused.

Special Equipment: *potions of super-heroism* and *speed*.

15. HALF-BREEDS

In this chamber hide three tanar'ri — a pair of cambions and an alu-fiend — who came to *Taelac Mirrimbar* to take refuge. They stole a powerful magical sword from the Abyssal lord Graz'zt, and they hoped to give him the laugh by holing up in Tapheon's fortress. The three fiends are sure that the recent mercenary attack was somehow orchestrated by Graz'zt, and now they fear for their lives. The trio's just waiting for a chance to flee the fortress — and the Abyss — before they're scragged, and they hope to peel the PCs into helping them.

Faare, the alu-fiend, spots the heroes through the gridwork walls as soon as they enter the fourth level. If it looks like the PCs are headed their way, the fiends wait; otherwise, they approach the party.

In any case, the three half-breeds try to trick the PCs. First, Hinvar (the suave cambion) casts *invisibility* on Veridis (the crude cambion). Then Hinvar and Faare use their *polymorph* and *shape change* powers to take the form of humans, and the two greet the party.

Ahead you spy two humans, one male and one female, both armed and armored — they look like plain-looking adventurers. They shrink back and stare at you cautiously for a

few seconds. Then a look at the faces of the PCs as they come forward, perhaps glad to see the sword.

Hinvar and Faare try to subtly *charm* the PCs and discover why they're in the Abyss. If they win the party over, the disguised fiends claim that they've just stolen the sword *blackshield* from Tapheon, and ask the heroes to take it from the Abyss and destroy it. Hinvar offers the sword to the PCs in a large bag, warning that the touch of the evil blade will cause them harm.

'Course, it's a peel — the half-breeds stole *blackshield* from Graz'zt, and they know that it's safe to touch. But they also know that the blade is cursed. Any sod who takes it from the Abyss will be attacked by an instantly conjured molydeus. The trio'd like nothing more than for the PCs to take the fall for their theft. And they hope to sneak along and steal *blackshield* back while the sods fight the molydeus.

If the PCs haven't already brought it up, Faare even uses her *ESP* power to learn that they seek the *vuulge*. She then claims that the pom-mel stone of the stolen

sword is "a powerful magical item called the *vuulge*." (Actually, she's never heard of the *vuulge*, but she tries to fake it.)

The PCs might ask the obvious question: "Why don't you bashers take the sword away yourselves?" But the cunning liars just say that they must stay in the fortress and free as many of the trapped slaves as they can. If the PCs scoff at such benevolence (or use magic to learn that the "humans" are actually evil), the disguised fiends then claim that they want to free the prisoners solely to hurt their enemy, Tapheon.

If the PCs seem reluctant to buy their story, Faare claims that they were just about to launch an attack on Tapheon's lieutenant — a powerful marilith who lives on the level. Hinvar and Faare offer to prove their intentions by slaying the six-armed fiend. "Will you then prove yourselves by taking the sword *blackshield* out of the Abyss?" she asks, playing on the PCs' guilt.

Naturally, the cross-trading tanar'ri know full well that the "marilith" in room 14 isn't as tough as she appears to be. But they figure the heroes don't know that, and hope that the leather-heads'll be suitably impressed by the "heroic deed."



If, in the end, the PCs still refuse to help the so-called humans, the cambion Veridis uses his invisibility to great advantage, attacking the party with surprise. His compatriots quickly drop their disguises and join in the combat (Hinvar draws *blackshield*, of course), hoping at least to get a bit of jink from the do-gooders. However, the half-breeds won't fight to the death; if seriously threatened, they try to flee the fortress.

On the other hand, if the PCs agree to carry the stolen sword out of the Abyss, the three fiends try to secretly follow the party (see "Out of the Abyss," below).

Veridis (tanar'ri — major cambion): AC -1 (*banded mail* +1, Dex); MV 15; HD 4; hp 26; THACO 17 (16 with Str, 14 with *short sword* +2); #AT 2; Dmg 1d6+3/1d6+3 (*short sword* +2, Str); SA spell-like powers; SD never surprised; MR 30%; SZ M (7' tall); ML elite (13); AL CE; XP 4,000.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *darkness* 15' radius, *detect magic*, *infravision*, *levitate* (7/day), and *teleport without error*.

S 17 (+1, +1), D 18, C 15, I 13, W 5, Ch 2.

Personality: rash, crude, and mean.

Special Equipment: *short sword* +2,

banded mail +1 (both were forged in the Abyss).

Thief Abilities: MS 80, HS 80, CW 95.

Hinvar (tanar'ri — baron cambion): AC -4 (*plate mail* +1, *shield* +1, Dex); MV 15; HD 6; hp 39; THACO 15 (12 with Str, 8 with *long sword* +4); #AT 2; Dmg 1d8+11/1d8+11 (*long sword* +4, Str); SA spell-like powers, wizard spells; SD never surprised; MR 30%; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (14); AL CE; XP 6,000.

Notes: Intelligence grants spells as a 6th-level wizard.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *charm person*, *darkness* 15' radius, *fear* (by touch), *infravision*, *levitate* (7/day), *polymorph self* (3/day), and *teleport without error*.

S 19 (+3, +7), D 18, C 18, I 18, W 13, Ch 19.

Personality: sly, charming, canny.

Special Equipment: *plate mail* +1, *shield* +1, *long sword*, *defender* +4 (all forged in the Abyss). The sword, named *blackshield*, is intelligent. It speaks tanar'ri, baatezu, and planar trade jargon; is CE in alignment; and has Int 14, ego 10, and the following powers: *detect good/evil* (10-foot radius) and *heal* (1/day).

Spells (4/2/2): 1st—*audible glamer*, *burning hands*, *magic missile*, *phantasmal force*; 2nd—*invisibility*, *web*; 3rd—*haste*, *lightning bolt*.

Thief Abilities: MS 80, HS 80, CW 95.

Faare (tanar'ri — alu-fiend): AC 2 (*ring of protection* +3); MV 12, Fl 15 (D); HD 2; hp 13; THACO 19 (18 with *light crossbow* +1); #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (scimitar) or 1d4+1 (*light*

crossbow +1); SA spell-like powers, wizard spells; SD *infravision* 240', intuition, steal life, +1 or better weapons (or cold iron) to hit; MR 30%; SZ M (5' tall); ML steady 12; Int genius (18); AL CE; XP 6,000.

Notes: Intelligence grants spells as a 9th-level wizard.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *charm person*, *darkness* 15' radius, *dimension door* (1/day), ESP, *infravision*, *shape change* (humanoid form of similar height and weight only), *suggestion*, and *teleport without error*.

SD—intuition warns of danger 75% of the time.

SD—restores hit points by touching foe (requires melee hit); foe suffers 1d8 points of damage, Faare gains half that number in hp.

Personality: seductive, vengeful, bitter.

Special Equipment: *ring of protection* +3, *light crossbow* +1 (both forged in the Abyss), scimitar.

Spells (4/3/3/2/1): 1st—*burning hands*, *magic missile* (x2), *wall of fog*; 2nd—*blur*, *knock*, *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter*; 3rd—*blink*, *dispel magic*, *hold person*; 4th—*stoneskin* (already cast), *wall of ice*; 5th—*cone of cold*.

WELCOME
+ ⊕ MY HOME.
WHERE FLESH FLOWS
LIKE WATER —
+ MY WHIM.
— TAPHEON



TELEPORTER

There are no stairs connecting the fourth level to the fifth — the only way to reach the next level is by teleportation. Most tanar'ri can teleport up on their own, but other visitors to the fortress must use the special metal plate found at the spot marked "T"

on the map.

If a PC steps onto the five-foot-square plate, he's instantly teleported to the area marked "T" on the map of the fifth level. At that spot is a similar plate that takes travelers back down to the fourth level.

THE FIFTH LEVEL (+ THE MAGGOT NES+)

Unlike other floors of Taelac Mirrimbar, the fifth level doesn't appear to be made of an iron gridwork with mortal captives built within. Actually, the gridwork's there, but it's been covered with a thick fluid — a secretion from the chasme that dwell on this level. The fluid's hardened into a brown, crumbly shell, and bits of the gridwork are visible through the coating in some areas.

The secretions form a network of narrow tunnels and low-ceilinged chambers. Many of the passages slope up or down, making movement difficult for the heroes (but not the chasme). Thus, the PCs continue to move at half their normal rates (as they do on other levels of the fortress).

More than any other area of Taelac Mirrimbar, the hive-like fifth level is alive with flies and maggots. The insects buzz and crawl all over any PCs who set foot on the level. Each hour, there's a 25% chance that maggots infest the wounds of any injured heroes, inflicting 1 point of dam-

age per hour until they're removed by application of extreme heat or a cure disease spell.

16. EGG CHAMBERS

Each of these dark, moist areas contains a vast number of chasme eggs. The eggs look like small round pods (6 inches in diameter), and though they're milky white in color, they glisten as if wet.

One adult chasme remains in each egg chamber at all times to guard the unhatched offspring. The buzzing fiends attack any intruder, but they won't leave their chambers to chase the PCs.

All of the other chasme that lived on this level were sent down to defend the fortress against the mercenary attack and ended up in the dead-book.

When the PCs enter one of the rooms, show the players the picture of the egg chamber on page 13 of Visions of War.

Chasme (1 in each egg chamber): AC -5; MV 6, FI 24 (D); HD 8+2; hp 41 each; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 2d4/2d4/1d4 (claw/claw/nose); SA fear, sleep drone, wounding, spell-like powers; MR 50%; SZ M (7' long); ML champion (16); Int average (10); AL CE; XP 14,000 each.

SA—anyone viewing a chasme must save vs. spell or flee in terror for 1d4 hours.

SA—once per encounter, each victim who hears a chasme's droning must save vs. spell or fall into deep sleep for 2d4 hours (can be awakened only if splashed with water, vigorously stimulated, or attacked by chasme).

SA—wounds inflicted by claws bleed for 2 points of damage per round until magically healed.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *darkness 15' radius*, *detect good* (always active), *detect invisibility* (always active), *gate 2d10* manes, 1d4+1 cambions, or 1 chasme; 40% chance; 3/day), *infravision*, *insect plague*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *telekinesis*, and *teleport without error*.

Personality: angry, protective of the eggs.

17. EXPOSED AREAS

Each of these chambers is a place where the iron gridwork of the fortress is visible through the thick chasme secretions. Here, the captives built into the fortress are still alive — though they're all raving mad. As they gibber and wail, they spew forth maggots and flies from their mouths.

18. GA+E

At the end of a long, narrow tunnel is a gate that leads to the highest level of the fortress. The DM can choose the physical nature of the gate, but the key is an emotion — specifically, selfish indifference to the needs of others.

Every tanar'ri in *Taelac Mirrimbar* knows the key, and some (like Arrikk the vrock) might even be willing to part

with the chant. Otherwise, the PCs must successfully cast the *ward sense* spell to determine the nature of the key.

THE UPPER LEVEL

By the time the PCs reach this level, Tapheon already knows they're coming. Fact is, the nalfeshnee is waiting for the adventurers, and there's a 50% chance that he's used his ESP power to learn that they've come for the *vuulge*.

'Course, it won't take long for Tapheon to learn the party's entire plan, including the dark of the Maeldur. Previously, the nalfeshnee knew nothing about the leviathan, its powers, or its link with the *vuulge*. Once he picks the chant out of the PCs' minds, he's sure to spread the word throughout the Abyss. For that reason, the PCs'd better not leave the fortress without putting Tapheon in the dead-book. But that's much, *much* easier said than done.

When the PCs pass through the gate to the upper level, read the following:

As you step out of the gate, you're greeted by an irritating, whining music. The rusting iron gridwork of the fortress is all around you, the captives within still alive. However, the prisoners' appearances have been wildly altered and disfigured — it even seems that a few have been shaped and reshaped over and over again.

Suddenly, you realize that the music you hear is the wail and moaning of the captives. Apparently, some foul sorcery has orchestrated their sobbing into grating, haunting melodies.

The room itself is empty, but above you a 40-foot-wide platform hangs from the ceiling by spike-covered chains. A terrible, twisted face, bestial in its fur and tusks, peeks over the side of the suspended disk, then ducks back.

The platform sways, and a body falls off, screaming, as it flung. The sod hits the floor with a crunch — dead. But the face looks very familiar.

The deader thrown to the party's feet exactly resembles a friend or family member dear to the PCs (preferably, someone known to more than one member of the party). Tapheon used ESP to pluck the sod's appearance from a player character's mind, then reshaped one of his slaves atop the platform to match and flung him over the side. It's just the nalfeshnee's way of unsettling the heroes.

The platform is a solid circle of iron 40 feet in diameter, suspended 30 feet above the floor. To reach the top, the PCs must climb the walls of the chamber or fly. Once they get high enough, they can see what's on top of the platform — namely, Tapheon and five slaves (one in the form of a marilith, and one in the shape of a balor, both bloodied and bruised).

The nalfeshnee sits atop a throne made of six more reshaped slaves bound together by wire. The fleshy chair is encrusted with jewels (112 total, each worth 100 gp), and topped with a bright green gem — the *vuulge*.

When the PCs spot the nalfeshnee, show the players the picture of Tapheon on page 14 of Visions of War.

Tapheon tries to use the *despoiler of flesh* to fight off the PCs, though he resorts to his own fearsome powers if necessary (see “A Broken Fiend,” starting on page 58, for details). None of the five slaves help the nalfeshnee in any way during the battle, though the PCs might be frightened by the so-called marilith and balor.

THE VUULGE

A rich green gem that seems to pulse with a life of its own, the *vuulge* is a bit of an enigma. Neither *identify* nor any similar spell reveals its nature. Anyone who speaks the name “Maeldur Et Kavurik” in the presence of the gem, however, activates its powers.

The speaker immediately knows the location of the Maeldur, wherever it is in the multiverse. Currently, the creature’s on Maladomini, the seventh layer of Baator. It’s held in a tank in the *Relentless*, one of the baatezu’s mobile fortresses.

What’s more, if a PC speaks into the *vuulge*, strange words issue forth from the gem in response — barely audible, sinister-sounding gibberish. The item is translating the PC’s speech into the ancient language of the baernaloths, the only tongue the leviathan still knows. If the PCs hope to communicate with the Maeldur once they find it, they must have the *vuulge*.

◆ ⊕ U + ⊕ F + THE ABYSS ◆

Once they have the object of their quest, the PCs can leave the fortress and return to the Whispering Gates. The gate through which they arrived also leads back to the *Darkhouse* in Sigil, but they must open it again with the key — a pound of hardened eyewing tear.

If the heroes didn’t think to bring any tear with them, all is not lost. The DM can let them find another gate in the cluster of caves that leads to Sigil (or anyplace else), or let them hunt for eyewings on the 348th layer. A good number of the creatures fly about the blasted landscape. ‘Course, such an excursion should be extremely dangerous. The heroes shouldn’t spend any more time in the Abyss than they have to (a good rule to live by).

If the half-breeds from *Taelac Mirrimbar* tricked the PCs into taking the stolen sword *blackshield* out of the Abyss, the heroes are attacked by a molydeus the instant they appear on another plane. If the two cambions and the alu-fiend managed to follow the party out of the fortress, they also attack the PCs — just long enough to steal back the sword and flee with their prize.

◆ THE DREAM ◆

The next time the PCs sleep after leaving the Abyss, one of the party has a *sending* dream. The recipient should be a PC with leadership qualities who has influence with the rest of

the group. The dream is sent from the ultroloths on Gehenna, but the canny fiends crafted it to seem like a message from the Upper Planes.

Read the following to the dreaming character:

In your dream, you’re standing on a wide open, lifeless plain. To your left, a horde of fiends of all types swarms over the horizon toward you. To your right, a horrible, amorphous monster with the face of a deva sits in chains.

A furry fiend with the head of a canine appears and whippers in the monster’s ear. Pressing forward to listen, you hear it murmur what you somehow know to be the name of a fiend. Suddenly, that fiend vanishes from its place in the slaving horde and appears in front of you, scratching and clawing with its razor-sharp talons! You raise your arms to defend yourself, but the fiend vanishes and reappears all around you, too fast to strike (much less avoid).

Then the canine-headed creature whispers the name of another fiend in the monster’s ear, and a second fiend materializes in front of you.

Suddenly, a winged, white-robed figure of fair form appears, slays the fiends, and chases away the whisperer. Your savior points toward the monster, who is now crying at its misdeeds.

Behind the monster, you see a befouled, slow-moving river the color of blood. A number of scholarly looking graybeards wade into the water, immerse themselves, and then emerge on the other bank. They stand dripping wet, staring blankly around like confused idiots.

The winged man tries to push the monster into the river, but the chains won’t budge. He motions for you to help him push. As he sweats with the strain, he says, “He knows each of their names, but not his own. . .”

At this point, let the PC make a Wisdom check at –2. If the PC fails the check, the dream ends. If the check succeeds, read:

As you look at the white-robed man, you notice tiny strings attached to his hands, legs, and wings, as if he were a marionette. The strings lead up into the sky, where a huge fiendish face looms overhead. The face is devoid of features other than white, bulbous eyes, and the fiend pulls at the man’s strings with clawed hands. Strangely enough, the winged man seems oblivious to it all.

The ultroloths sent the dream to the sleeping PC so the party would “realize” what they had to do next. The dream’s meant to reveal that the Maeldur gives the fiends the ability to teleport because it knows their names, and that if given, in its own name, it could transport itself to the River Styx. The waters of the Styx would rob the Maeldur of its memories, including the names of the fiends. Thus, the evil creatures would lose their power to teleport.

If the dreaming PC makes the Wisdom check, he sees through the veil of deceit and catches a glimpse of the true masters behind the plot — the ultroloths.

SLEEPING THE BINDS: If the heroes don't understand the meaning of the dream, the DM can give them a few more chances before the end of the adventure to pick up clues. Obviously, the ultroloths might send the PCs another, more pointed dream. The PCs could also conduct more research at the Great Library in Sigil (or go on a side adventure to dig up an ancient book hidden elsewhere), and find more obscure references to the Maeldur and how it uses names to control teleportation.

⊕ U ⊕ OF ⊕ THE ♦ FRYING PAN ♦

Once the PCs use the *vuulge* to learn the location of the Maeldur, they can head for the *Relentless*. The giant fortress currently rolls through Maladomini, the seventh layer of Baator. It's traveling through the ruined landscape on a path that'll take it to Cania (the eighth layer) and eventually Nessus (the ninth). See, the baatezu've tumbled to the fact that the Maeldur is a valuable prize, and they plan on hiding it away in the most feared and protected layer of their home plane. Fortunately for the PCs, the *Relentless* hasn't yet made it that far.

Course, reaching Maladomini isn't easy. The best-known spot in that layer is Grenpoli, the city of diplomacy, where bloods come to study politics, schemes, and devious machinations at the Political School. Portals to Grenpoli aren't exactly common, but Sigil's sure to have one or two.

Still, once back in the Cage, the PCs will have to shake (or garnish) a few chatty berks until the truth falls loose. Eventually, the PCs're pointed to *Heldoniver's*, a tiny candlemaker's shop in the city's Lower Ward. Chant says the shop has a portal to Grenpoli, and that *Heldoniver* himself can give out the key.

Truth is, the candlemaker (Pl/d human/T10/Fated/NE) is in league with the baatezu, and as good as liar as they come. Folks think that the portal in his shop leads only to Grenpoli. But depending on which key's used, the pathway can take a body to a number of locations on Baator.

When the PCs approach *Heldoniver*, the berk inquires as to where they want to go — and why. But no matter what the heroes say, the candlemaker plans on sending them to the wrong place (after all, the PCs aren't likely to be allies of the baatezu). He gives them a key that he claims will take them to the city of Grenpoli, and shows them to the portal. If asked, he assures the party that the portal is two-way, and even warns them to "hold on to that key!"

THE REAL CHANT: None of what *Heldoniver* says is true. His key actually takes the PCs to the iron mines found below the city of Malatanni, and they *can't* return to Sigil the same way. However, the mines turn out to be a better destination for the party — the *Relentless* is nearby, as its crew prepares to storm the city above.



UNDERNEATH ◆ MALA+ANNI ◆

Once the PCs step through the portal, it won't be long before they realize that Heldoniver led them astray. Instead of ending up in a city, they emerge into the darkness of an underground slag mine (see the map on page 73). As soon as the heroes provide light, read:

The smell of sulfur is thick and stifling, and the air is filled with acrid, iron particulate matter. You don't seem to be in a city. Appearances can be deceiving on the planes, but it looks — and smells — like you're in a grimy iron mine.

Long ago, the baatezu stripped the mine to provide building materials for the city above. The tunnels are now empty, except for a few creatures that take shelter here to hide from the fiends of the plane.

1. ARRIVAL AREA

This cavern contains nothing but cast-off mining tools that look to be centuries old, and a half-eaten bariaur corpse that looks to be just a few days old. Fact is, Heldoniver peeled the bariaur the same way he did the PCs, though the furry sod was ill-prepared for a trip to the mines. The vargouilles (see area 7, below) made short work of him, and the orcs (see area 5, below) stole his equipment.

2. COLLAPSED TUNNEL

Here, the PCs find a tunnel filled with rubble from a past cavern. The passageway has completely collapsed, and the rubble extends for dozens of feet, making the tunnel impassible.

3. HOOK SPIDERS

Four hook spiders have recently made their lair in the tunnels, hoping to prey upon the orcs. At the entry to this cavern, the clutch of spiders attacks with surprise (their psionic invisibility keeps them hidden).

If the PCs still pose too great a threat, the spiders fall back farther into the cavern. If the heroes follow, they have an 80% chance of stumbling over a spider-silk trip wire that drops a web-net over them from above. The net can trap up to three man-sized characters, but any PC who makes a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation ducks out of the way in time. Any PCs who fail the save are held fast until one of them tears the net with a successful bend bars roll (or until a comrade outside the net spends a full turn cutting them free).

At the back of the cave lie two humans and a githzerai, prior victims of the spiders. The three corpses are drained of blood and covered with 18 feasting spiderlings (young hook spiders, 1 hp each). If the PCs examine the bodies, they find a few normal items (weapons and equipment), a potion of *oil of earth elemental invulnerability*, 89 gp, 34 sp, and a silver ring worth 50 gp.

Hook spider (4): AC 5; MV 9, Jp 6; HD 4+4; hp 34, 29, 25, 23; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA hook, poison, psionics; SD camouflage; SZ M (4' long); ML elite (13); Int low (6); AL LE; XP 975 each.

Notes: DMs who don't use psionics can give the spiders the following spell-like powers instead: *invisibility*, *reduce* (reverse of *enlarge*, self only), *ESP*, *tongues*, and *suggestion*.

SA—if both claws hit, victim is held and automatically bitten (victim must make an open doors check to escape).

SA—bite is poisonous (onset time: 2 rounds); victim who makes a save vs. poison suffers 2d4 points of damage, while victim who fails the save suffers 2d5 points of damage.

SA—psionics, Level: 3, Dis/Sci/Dev: 2/2/7, Attack/Defense: None/MB, M-, Score: 12, PSPs: 45. Psionic powers:

- ◆ *Psychometabolic* — Sciences: shadow form. Devotions: body control, body equilibrium, chameleon power, reduction.
 - ◆ *Telepathic* — Sciences: mindlink. Devotions: contact, attraction, invisibility.
- SD—gains surprise when using psionic powers to hide.

4. ANCIENT+ BAA+ORIAN

Before the baatezu inhabited Baator, the plane was home to beings even older than the fiends. It's wrong to call the original residents "creatures," really, because they're actually essences of powers and beliefs from an unimaginably ancient age.

The beings still lie scattered about Baator, seeping through the substance of the layers and the minds of the denizens, their presence virtually unknown and unknowable. Occasionally, though, they take material form in Maladomini, drawn for some mysterious reason to the catacombs beneath the empty burgs of the layer. One such entity — the "vortex" shape on the map — sleeps in this cavern.

Currently, the being has taken the form of a light-absorbing void. If the PCs enter the cavern while carrying a light source, read the following:

Something in this darkened cavern seems to be moving, fluttering in the air. No — it's your light. The light is moving? Something's stealing the light away!

No matter how magical or mundane the source, the light begins to pull away from the party and flow toward the rear of the chamber. Read:

It's almost as though the light turns into twinkling sand and slowly flows toward the back of the cavern, like grains falling through an hourglass. But at a certain point, the particles of light disappear, as though somehow consumed.

After one round, it seems to the PCs that their bodies, their possessions, and even parts of the cavern's walls also begin to break down into tiny particles and float off toward the rear of the cavern. Truth is, it's just the light reflected off

of all visible objects that's drawn to the ancient Baatorian. 'Course, as the objects are drained of reflected light, they become invisible.

If the PCs remain in the chamber for five more rounds, all light is totally consumed (magical sources drained of light are useless forevermore). The heroes and all they carry are now invisible. Even if the PCs create a new source of light, nothing that had been illuminated by the previous source can be seen.

Visibility slowly returns over the next 1d2+1 hours. If any PCs try to hide in shadows while partially visible, they gain a bonus of 30% to the roll.

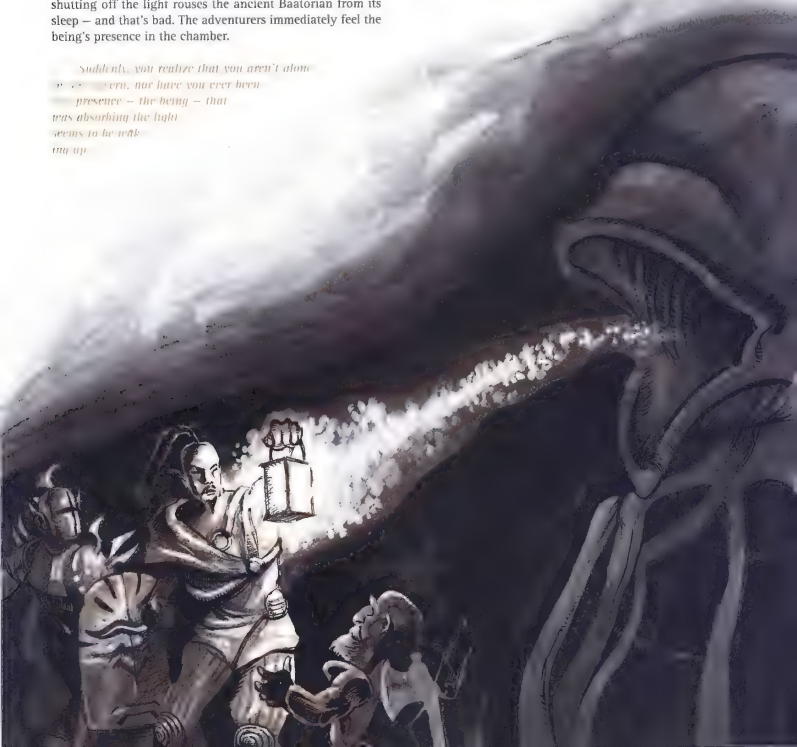
If the PCs douse their light source before it's fully drained, they won't turn completely invisible. However, shutting off the light rouses the ancient Baatorian from its sleep — and that's bad. The adventurers immediately feel the being's presence in the chamber.

*Suddenly, you realize that you aren't alone —
even, nor have you ever been —
presence — the being — that
was absorbing the light
seems to be waking
up.*

The smartest thing for the PCs to do is stand perfectly still and avoid making any noise. After one round, the being will simply settle back into its sleeplike state.

If the PCs do anything to draw the being's attention, it immediately consumes not only all light (if any), but also energy — including the heroes' life force. Every living thing within 50 feet must make a saving throw vs. spell or lose one energy (experience) level. This process continues for 1d4 rounds, after which the being leaves the cavern.

THE REAL CHANT: Nothing short of a wish can affect the Baatorian in its current state. Thus, no statistics are given for the entity.



5. ENHANCED ORCS

Long ago, the baatezu tried to breed a new soldier for the Blood War. They used orc stock (orcs were handy), and tried to magically enhance the creatures to be more powerful. The fiends wanted to create something along the lines of a lawful evil troll. However, they were never satisfied with the results, and they dumped the leftover specimens in the city of Malatanni. Preferring to live underground, the orcs descended into the mines.

The baatezu didn't realize that the orcs just needed a few more generations to reach the "proper" state. Fact is, the enhanced orcs that live under Malatanni today are easily the equal of trolls, and they've spread throughout the tunnels. They plan to eventually rise up in a wide-scale rebellion against their creators (at least those on Maladomini), but it'll take many centuries for the orcs to achieve enough numbers for such a war.

Meanwhile, the orcs wander the tunnels, scour for food, and try to keep out of sight. Those in the cavern marked "5" just recently entered the area. They have no lair, and each carries a large sack of food, equipment, and other belongings (including 2d20 gp worth of miscellaneous treasure).

When the PCs encounter the orcs, read:

Lumbering out of the darkness are a number of brutish giants with bestial faces. When they catch sight of you, they drop their large, obviously heavy bags with a clattering crash and draw huge swords. As they approach your group, one of the creatures grunts a guttural phrase that almost seems to be a question.

If any of the PCs happen to speak orcs (not likely, unless they're prime-material characters), they understand the giant orc's speech. In a corrupted form of orcs, the creature said: "Humm — what we got here? Our bags is full o' grub, but maybe we gets more now, eh?"

Enhanced orc (8): AC 4; MV 9; HD 8+5; hp 45 each; THACO 11 (8 with Str); #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d8 (fist/fist/bite) or 1d10+7 (two-handed sword, Str); SA battle frenzy; SD regeneration; SW sunlight; SZ L (8' tall); ML elite (14); Int low (7); AL LE; XP 3,000 each.

Notes: Orcs have Strength 19 (+3, +7).

SA—each time struck in combat, orc has a 25% chance (not cumulative) of entering battle frenzy, gaining double the number of attacks and gaining +2 to attack and damage rolls.

SD—regenerates 1 hp/round unless slain.

SW—suffers -1 to attack rolls in sunlight.

6. CORNUGON

The high-ups of Malatanni have charged a cornugon named Kai'ki to stay in the mines and guard a staircase that leads to the city above. Kai'ki's been stuck with the thankless job because of a past transgression known only to him, but the

fiend considers the punishment unfair. Thus, he's not beyond accepting a little garnish — say, 500 gp per head — from folks who want to go up into the city.

When the PCs enter this area, read:

The walls in this chamber are more finished, with smooth fitted-stone surfaces. To one side, a staircase ascends up out of the darkness. Blocking the stairs, however, is a loathsome fiend. Its nine-foot-tall body is sheathed in barbed scales, and dark, shadowy wings rise from its back. A serpentine tail flicks about its clawed feet, a movement somewhat matched by the monster's long whip.

The two regular rooms beyond Kai'ki's chamber are mostly empty (the cornugon just stores food and a few personal belongings there). The rooms underscore the fact that the caverns become more finished as they get closer to the stairs leading up to Malatanni.

Kai'ki has made a pact with the hook spiders nearby — he won't bother them as long as they don't try to go up into the city. The cornugon's also cowed the vargouilles (see area 7, below) into doing as he says. And his high-ups've warned him that some of the baatezu's magically enhanced orcs may be in the area. However, Kai'ki knows nothing of the ancient Baatorian.

Kai'ki (baatezu — cornugon): AC -2; MV 9, Fl 18 (C); HD 10; hp 51; THACO 11 (8 with Str); #AT 4 or 1 + weapon; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d4+1/1d3 (claw/claw/bite/tail) or 1d3 (tail) + 1d6+6 (barbed whip, Str); SA fear, wounds, stun; SD regeneration, +2 or better weapons to hit; MR 50%; SZ L (9' tall); ML elite (14); Int exceptional (15); AL LE; XP 10,000.

Notes: Cornugon has Strength 18/00 (+3, +6).

SA—radiates fear in 5-foot radius; victims must save vs. rod/staff/wand or flee for 1d6 rounds.

SA—wounds from tail attack bleed for 1 point of damage per round until treated.

SA—blow from whip stuns victim for 1d4 rounds unless he saves vs. paralysis.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, detect magic, ESP, gate* (2d6 barbas, 50% chance, 1/day; 2d8 abishai, 35% chance, 1/day; and 1d3 cornugons, 20% chance, 1/day), *infravision, know alignment* (always active), *lightning bolt* (3/day), *produce flame, pyrotechnics, suggestion, teleport without error, and wall of fire* (1/day).

SD—regenerates 2 hp per melee round.

7. VARGOUILLES

Ten hideous vargouilles lair in this chamber, near the entrance to the city. Before the cornugon Kai'ki was posted by the stairs, the vargouilles used to fly up into Malatanni at night to find food. Now the monsters rely on subterranean hunting (and the occasional food-bribe from Kai'ki) to survive. They fear the whip-wielding guard and do as he commands.

Vargouille (10); AC 8; MV Fl 12 (B); HD 1+1; hp 6 each; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (bite); SA fear, kiss, poison; SD infravision 120'; SW light; SZ S (3' wingspan); ML average (8); Int low (5); AL NE; XP 650 each.

SA—all who view a vargouille and hear its shriek must save vs. spell or be paralyzed with fear until attacked (attack automatically hits). Those who make their save or suffer one attack are immune for the rest of the encounter.

SA—can kiss a paralyzed victim, who then becomes a vargouille in 3d6 hours; *continual light* halts the transformation, and *cure disease* (if cast by a 7th-level priest) reverses it.

SA—damage from bite is permanent for victims who fail to save vs. spell (though *heal* restores 1d8 hp, *regenerate* restores 3d8 hp at the rate of 1 hp/round, and *wish* restores all lost hp).

SW—blinded by *continual light* or daylight.

8. DEEPER IN+O+HE MINES

If the PCs proceed into this passage, they travel further into the mining tunnels — the wrong destination. The DM should stress that the passage angles down sharply, and note that the gritty, metallic feel in the air grows much stronger. Hopefully, the party will go back.

Course, if the PCs persist, the DM's free to map and populate the deeper tunnels as desired. No doubt the heroes will run into more enhanced orcs (who have a whole burg hidden somewhere in the mines), rogue baatezu, and worse.

◆ MALATANNI ◆

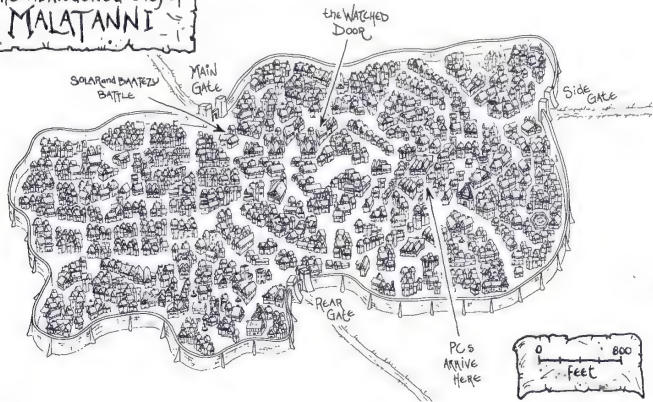
If the PCs make it past Kai'kl, they can ascend the steps to Malatanni (see the rough map of the city below). The stairs lead into a ruined stone building that's obviously long-deserted but doesn't look like it saw much use regardless. Exiting the ruin brings the PCs into the city proper; they emerge at the spot marked on the map. But the view isn't much better — the stone-built town seems empty, full of high towers and imposing fortresses, but no people.

Fact is, Malatanni was rejected centuries ago. The slug-like archduke of the layer forces his slaves and servants to forever build him a perfect city. But when each new burg is finished, the archduke's never satisfied, and the slaves start again in a new location. Thus, most cities on Maladomini are intact but abandoned.

Malatanni, though, has found a population: petitioners and slaves (humans, demihumans, orcs, half-orcs, goblins, kobolds, and even fire giants) who've fled the tyrannies of the fiends. The city also holds a few rogue baatezu, other planar races (hordlings, yugoloths, rogue modrons, and maelephants), and intelligent monsters (including medusae, beholders, manticores, and rakshasas). Despite these varied inhabitants, however, the burg's still vastly underpopulated.

The folk of Malatanni want to avoid contact with the baatezu, so they live fairly peaceably together. They're led by a strange, rather unique individual — a fallen solar

THE ABANDONED CITY OF MALATANNI



named Archimedes (PI/♂ aasimon [solar]/HD 22/N). This incredibly powerful blood enforces goodwill among his subjects; he seeks to protect all those that the baatezu'd scrag or kill. Easily as mighty as several pit fiends, Archimedes has enough power to keep his presence a secret from the high-ups of Baator.

[1st-Real Chant:] The solar used to serve a power on Elysium, but Archimedes' "hands on" approach to fighting evil landed him in hot water. To stave off the fiends, he felt, a cutter had to be willing to lower himself into the darkness. Thus, the aasimon lied, peeled wicked bashers, dealt with the fiends, and committed other questionable acts. Eventually, he was booted from Elysium, and now he figures he can best hurt the baatezu (his most hated foes) by working right under their foul noses. Though his alignment is neutral, Archimedes still leans heavily toward good most of the time.

EXPLORING + THE CITY

If the PCs poke around in Malatanni, the DM should make them think that the city is deserted — and then let them spy a mysterious shadow. Read:

The city stretches around you as far as you can see, filling a shallow vale with buildings of stone and iron. An oily rain falls from a dark, foreboding sky. Everything is stark and dead quiet.

Then a lone shadow passes from one building to the next, far away down an empty street.

If the PCs follow the shadow, they encounter a human female named Nelvael. She stands calmly in the rain, apparently waiting for the party.

The woman is clothed in a long red cloak that covers silvery plate armor, and her long brown hair is soaked with rain water. She smiles at you. "New to the hidden city, are you?"

Like most of the residents of Malatanni, Nelvael has her own secrets to hide. She used to belong to the Mercykillers, but she abandoned the pursuit of law — fact is, she quit the faction and fled to Baator after committing a major offense against the group. She fears that the Red Death now hunts for her. If any of the PCs are Mercykillers, Nelvael watches them very closely. She knows nothing about the Maeldur, the *Relentless*, or anything else regarding the party's quest.

Nelvael (PI/♀ human/F10/N): AC 0 (field plate, *shield +1*); MV 12; hp 69; THACO 11 (10 with Str); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8+3 (*long sword +2, Str*); SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12).

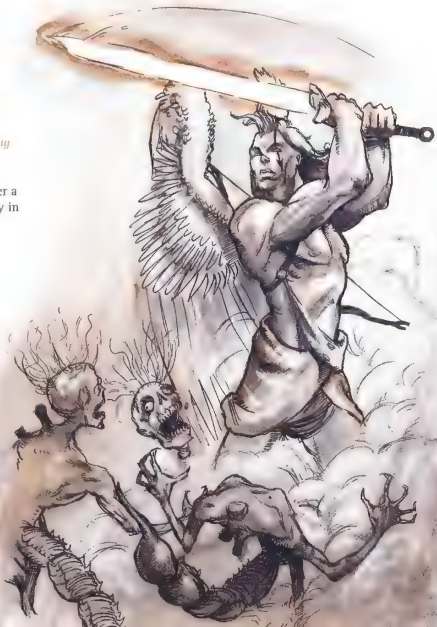
S 17 (+1, +1), D 10, C 15, I 12, W 11, Ch 12.

Personality: Hard, self-serving.

Special Equipment: *long sword +2, shield +1* (both forged in Sigil), field plate armor.

Nelvael brings the PCs to a tavern (marked on the map) called *The Watched Door*. Inside, the heroes learn that the city isn't abandoned after all.

Quiet, weary-eyed patrons fill the dark alehouse. Planar and prime-material creatures sip their drinks next to orcs, goblins, fiends, and all manner of monstrous customers. Something about the demeanor of the clientele suggests that even far folk on the lower planes these suds have had it hard.



Because the baatezu control virtually all of the known portals on Maladomini, the folks here are more or less trapped in the city. They're on the run from the fiendish masters of the plane, and hiding under the protective wing of Archimedes is their only option.

If the PCs ask around in *The Watched Door*, they find that a few patrons have heard of the *Relentless*, but none know its current location. Fact is, if the PCs reveal that the mobile fortress is reported to be trundling across the layer somewhere, the berks in the tavern are surprised – and a little afraid.

If the PCs wish to sleep, they can find an abandoned (but unfurnished) kip almost anywhere in Malatanni. The DM's free to flesh out the player characters' time in the city as much as desired. Malatanni holds plenty of monsters, fiends, and other residents, and the PCs can try to strike new alliances and profitable deals (though some encounters might end in bloodshed or worse).

At some point, however, disaster befalls the hidden city, though the calamity is a boon to the PCs.

BAA+EZU A++ACK

The folks in *The Watched Door* who worried when told the *Relentless* was nearby were right to be perry. As the mobile fortress rolls across the layer, it sends out osyluth scouts. One such patrol came to Malatanni and discovered that rogues and fugitives – including a hated solar – had holed up in the supposedly deserted city. The bony fiends teleported back to the fortress before the city's defenders could lift a finger – fact is, all they could do was warn the town.

As chant spreads, the entire city panics, and rightfully so. Within half an hour, a host of osyluths, barbazu, and abishai from the fortress teleport into Malatanni. Archimedes tries to hold off the invaders, aided by an elite cadre of humans, a stone giant, a yagnoloth, a hobgoblin priest, and a githyanki sorcerer. The baatezu aren't strong enough to harm the solar, but his henchmen can't stand against the tide of fiends.

Once they tumble to the situation, the PCs can flee with everyone else, stay and fight, or use the opportunity to make their way toward the nearby fortress. (Refer to the map of Maladomini on page 80.)

ESCAPE. If the PCs try to give the baatezu the laugh, they almost certainly get away – the lawful fiends are occupied with bringing down the solar. The inhabitants of the city head for a prearranged meeting point far off into the layer. Archimedes stays in Malatanni until his charges are safely away and more powerful baatezu arrive in the city – fiends that can hurt even a solar.

Once he arrives at the meeting point, Archimedes uses his *wish* ability to move the town's population to relative safety (another abandoned city on this layer). 'Course, he must also contend with the fact that the baatezu now know of his presence on their plane.

FIGURE. If the PCs stay and fight, they're in big trouble. Over a thousand baatezu attack the city. As Archimedes' guards fall, it should become obvious that the defenders can't win, not even with a solar on their side. Archimedes bids the heroes to flee.

APPROACH THE RELENTLESS. Most of the rolling juggernaut's fiends are busy attacking Malatanni, and the fortress itself has come to a stop about four miles from the city. It's a perfect time to try to infiltrate the *Relentless*.

If the PCs try to approach with stealth, they don't find it too hard to get out of the city (most of the attackers swarm around Archimedes). Likewise, the heroes have no encounters on the way to the fortress. The baatezu teleported directly to the city, so there aren't any ground troops to confront. Even the osyluth patrols that normally stay close to the *Relentless* are busy attacking the city.

If, on the other hand, the PCs surrender to the invaders, the baatezu gladly take them alive. The fiends need fresh bodies to use as fodder to power the engines of the *Relentless*. This tactic gets the heroes aboard the fortress, but escape will be difficult. The osyluths are well-versed in dealing with prisoners, particularly cutters with spells or spell-like powers. The fiends take all of the PCs' equipment and watch the adventurers closely, keeping them under heavy guard.

The next few pages provide a bit of history on the *Relentless* and a look at its layout, followed by sections detailing how the PCs can approach, enter, and explore the fortress.

◆ THE RELENTLESS ◆

Among the crowning achievements of the baatezu warcraftsmen are the mobile fortresses first created a few decades ago. The *Relentless* is the largest monstrosity of the fleet (see the side view of the fortress on page 83). It's a stone castle over 700 feet long and 600 feet wide that sits atop two massive stone rollers rising over 150 feet high. The fortress moves very slowly, but it crushes everything in its path – enemy troops, cities, forests, and even small mountains.

The huge rollers of the *Relentless* are powered by pain, and kocrachon engineers torture prisoners to make the fortress lumber forward. The torment engines are located deep within the structure's bowels.

The baatezu use the *Relentless* exclusively for the Blood War. See, when they venture deep into "foreign" territory, they don't always have the time to build a defensible fortress. Thus, the fiends created the rolling castle to move with the troops, providing shelter both during an advance and when the army halts to secure an area.

The commander of the *Relentless* is a pit fiend named Lydzin. She's advised by a gelugon wizard and defended by a squad of cornugon guards/enforcers. But the *Relentless*



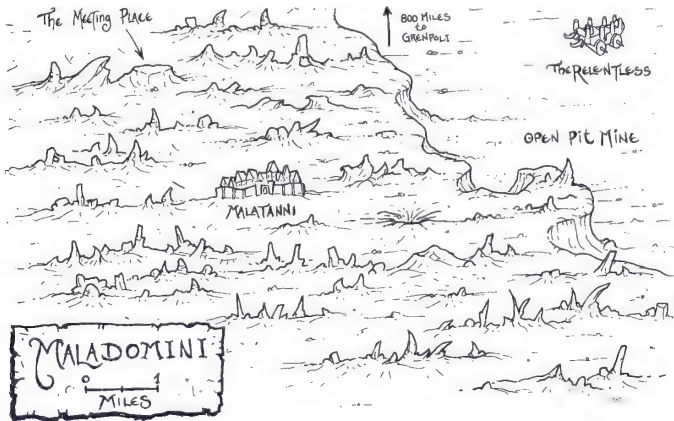
can carry thousands of baatezu. Usually, the bulk of its troops are lemuris and nupperibos, supplemented by barbazu and abishai. Currently, though, most of the least fiends have been replaced by osyluths. After all, the *Relentless* is traveling through Baator, and cannon fodder like lemuris and nupperibos are more useful in the front lines of battle. Besides, the osyluths're better suited to scout out a safe path for the fortress. Lydzin still doesn't know what the Maeldur is, and she doesn't even trust her own kind with such an unknown prize.

The pit fiend knew she'd found something valuable the moment her troops broke into the arcanaloth lair on Gehenna and spotted the Maeldur. She sent word to the Dark Eight themselves. Lydzin then converted part of the mobile fortress into a large holding tank for the apparently aquatic creature, and brought it on board.

THE REAL CHANT: The DM should keep in mind that the *Relentless* is filled with fiends of great power in huge numbers. Even if the PCs are a mighty band of warriors who slew most of the tanar'ri in the Fortress of Indifference, they can't fight off the whole crew of the *Relentless*.

LAYOUT

This section provides an overview of the deck of the *Relentless*. Please refer to the top-down map of the fortress on the inside back cover of this booklet.



Note that the juggernaut's catapults and ballistae were made on Baator for special use in the fortress. Thus, they can be fired more often than can most such siege weapons.

RAMP. These two metal ramps are 20 feet wide, 140 feet long, and fully retractable. They're pulled into the fortress when the *Relentless* is moving or under attack. The retraction process takes about ten minutes, with dozens of lemuris below deck tugging on chains and pulleys.

At the top of each ramp is a well-fortified gate, usually manned by 20 barbazu armed with heavy crossbows (as well as their fearsome saw-toothed glaives). The gates and the areas immediately behind them are about 100 feet off the ground, though still 60 feet lower than the main deck of the fortress. Behind the gates, permanent ramps rise up and curve around until they reach the main deck. The inner ramps are surrounded by defensive battlements, so enemies who storm the gates are assaulted by baatezu all the way up to the deck.

Barbazu (baatezu) (20 per gate): AC 3; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 30 each; THACO 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d2/1d2/1d8 (claw/claw/beard) or 2d6 (glaive) or 1d4+1 (heavy cross-bow); SA glaive, disease, frenzy, spell-like powers; SD +1 or better weapons to hit; MR 30%; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); Int low (6); AL LE; XP 6,000 each.

SA—each wound inflicted by glaive causes 2 points of bleeding damage per round until bound.

SA—wirelike beard attack transmits disease 25% of the time.

SA—in combat, a group of barbazus has a cumulative 10% chance per round to go berserk until the battle ends. In frenzy state, they never check morale, gain double the number of attacks, gain a +2 bonus on attack and damage rolls, and have AC 6.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illusion*, *affect normal fires*, *animate dead*, *charm person*, *command*, *fear* (by touch), *gate* (2d6 abishai [50% chance] or 1d6 barbazus [35% chance]; 1/day), *infravision*, *know alignment* (always active), *produce flame*, *suggestion*, and *teleport without error*.

ROLLER. These huge stone cylinders are unbelievably heavy—only magic can make them turn. Their weight also gives them the power to roll over virtually anything. A close look reveals that the rollers are covered in dried mud, old bloodstains, and whatever else they've crushed. Fact is, the *Relentless* has seen so much use that its rollers are no longer completely smooth. Cracks and missing chunks are as likely to be filled with bones and gore as they are with rocks and dirt.

LARGE TOWER. These four main towers rise 100 feet above the rest of the fortress. Each tower has five levels joined by iron ladders, and each level is manned by 4d6 barbazus archers (see above for statistics). What's more, there's a 20% chance that each level is also defended by another type of baatezu (such as a cornugon or amnizu) with useful, long-range magical attacks.

The top of each tower has 4d6 more archers, plus two heavy catapults (THACO 16) on swiveling iron platforms. Each catapult is manned by 10 lemures. Once every six rounds, the weapons can fire boulders and metal shards (causing 3d10 points of damage).

Each of the four towers is commanded by one red abishai, though the leaders might defer to any greater baatezu spellcasters present.

Lemure (baatezu) (20 per tower): AC 7; MV 3; HD 2; hp 8 each; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (claws); SD regeneration, immune to mind-affecting spells; SZ M (5' tall); ML never checked; Int semi (3); AL LE; XP 120 each.

SD—regenerates 1 hp/round, even after "slain," unless destroyed by holy water/item.

Red abishai (baatezu) (4): AC 1; MV 9, Fl 12 (C); HD 6+3; hp 27 each; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d4+1 (claw/claw/tail); SA poison, dive, spell-like powers; SD regeneration, +1 or better weapons to hit; SW holy water; MR 30%; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); Int average (10); AL LE; XP 9,000 each.

SA—victims struck by tail must save vs. poison or die.

SA—can dive at foes, striking with both claws at +2 to attack roll and causing double damage.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illu-*

sion, *animate dead*, *change self*, *charm person*, *command*, *gate* (2d6 lemures [60% chance] or 1d3 abishai [30% chance]; 1/day), *infravision*, *know alignment* (always active), *produce flame*, *pyrotechnics*, *scare*, *suggestion*, and *teleport without error*.

SD—regenerates 1 hp/round except for damage caused by holy water/item.

SW—holy water causes 2d4 points of damage.

SMALL TOWER. Each of the four small towers on the deck is 80 feet high and has four levels. A group of 3d4 barbazus archers defends each level, and one light catapult (manned by 10 lemures) sits on top of each tower. Once every four rounds, each catapult (THACO 14) can fire small boulders and metal shards that inflict 2d10 points of damage.

Each small tower is commanded by a red abishai, and the structures rarely contain any spellcasting greater baatezu.

In the two small towers over the rear rollers, the lowest levels are unmanned—the rollers block the angle to the ground.

OTHER BATTLEMENTS. The entire perimeter of the *Relentless* is protected by battlements from which defenders can hurl missiles or cast spells in relative safety. In a standard battle, each 20-foot section is manned by 1d3 barbazus and 2d10 lemures. *Course, those numbers could swell quickly as baatezu commanders move troops around to react to the movements of the enemy.

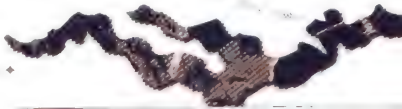
FORWARD BATTLE DECK. This is the section of the fortress that sees the most fighting. As the *Relentless* rolls into battle, every available archer, artillery, and spellcaster fires weapons or magic at the opponents. (Bundles of spears and javelins are kept here by the dozens, constantly replenished from the vast armories.) The massive rollers crush any sods who survive the baatezu's assault.

The central area also has seven heavy ballistae (THACO 17) that fire huge spears (3d10 points of damage). Each is manned by a pair of black abishai, with three nupperibos to cock the mechanism. As a team, the fiends can fire each weapon once every six rounds. A red abishai oversees the entire ballistae crew.

Nupperibo (baatezu) (3 per ballistae): AC 9; MV 6; HD 1; hp 4 each; THACO 19; #AT 2 or 1; Dmg 1d2/1d2 (claw/claw) or 1d6 (club); SA fear; SD regeneration, immune to mind-affecting spells; SZ M (5' tall); ML never checked; Int non (0); AL LE; XP 120 each.

SA—a group of 10 nupperibos attacking the same foe can use *cause fear* if commanded to do so.

SD—regenerates 1 hp/round, even after "slain," unless destroyed by holy water/item.



Black abishai (baatezu) (2 per ballista): AC 5; MV 9, FI 12 (C); HD 4+1; hp 17 each; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d4+1 (claw/claw/tail); SA poison, dive, spell-like powers; SD regeneration, +1 or better weapons to hit; SW holy water; MR 30%; SZ L (8' tall); ML average (9); Int average (8); AL LE; XP 7,000 each.

Notes: For details on special attacks, defenses, and weaknesses, refer to the red abishai statistics above.

APPROACHING TOWER The fiends stationed on this 70-foot-tall tower try to slay any enemies that fly over the top of the battlements. Each of the 12 heavy ballistae (THACO 17) can swivel 360 degrees horizontally and almost 180 degrees vertically, so their firing arcs have no real limit. They can launch spears (3d10 points of damage) once every six rounds, even at foes flying directly overhead.

The ballistae are manned as are those in the forward battle area: two black abishai and three nupperihos each. But six red abishai command the weapons (one for every two ballistae), and an amnizu has control of the entire tower.

The commanders of the *Relentless* sometimes stand on the air defense tower to observe a battle and issue orders. 'Course, they often teleport to the forward battle area and the top of the castle to gain every vantage point.

Amnizu: AC -1; MV 6, FI 15 (C); HD 9; hp 48; THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (touch); SA forget, spell-like powers; SD +2 or better weapons to hit; SW holy word; MR 50%; SZ M (4' tall); ML elite (14); Int exceptional (15); AL LE; XP 11,000.

Notes: The amnizu's touch channels harmful energy into the victim. It ignores ordinary armor, so the amnizu need hit only AC 10 to cause damage. Magical pluses of armor, shields, or items (rings, etc.) do improve the target's AC.

SA—victim of touch attack must save vs. spell or lose one day's memory.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, fireball* (3/day), *gate* (2d10 abishai [50% chance] or 1d8 erinyes [30% chance]; 1/day), *imprisonment* (1/day), *infravision, know alignment* (always active), *suggestion*, and *teleport without error*.

SW—a holy word drives amnizu back to Stygia (its home layer).

COMMANDER Commander Lydzin, her gelugon advisor, and her cornugon guards dwell and conduct business in this structure at the rear of the fortress. See "Exploring the Castle," below, for more information.

STONE STACKS These stone cylinders are eight feet in diameter and rise 80 feet into the air. As victims are burned in the engine room below deck, the stacks belch forth black, oily smoke.

MINOR BUILDING This area is obviously newer than the rest of the fortress. A large

rectangular pit (30 feet deep) has been set into the stone, taking up space that once was filled with barracks and armories. The pit's filled with foul, brackish water, and in the pool rests the gargantuan Maeldur. The creature lolls in a dim haze, almost completely unaware of its surroundings. See "The Maeldur," below, for more information.

LARGE These large iron doors open to reveal ramps that lead down into the lower area of the fortress, collectively known as below deck (as on a ship). See "Below Deck," below, for more information.

APPROACHING THE ◆ RELENTLESS ◆

No matter how the PCs make their way toward where the *Relentless* waits, their first good look at the fortress should be staggering.

When the PCs see the rolling fortress, show the players the picture of the Relentless on page 15 of Visions of War.

Read the following:

Over the next rise, the towers of what must be a castle rise high into the air, stone battlements protecting the fig-ures crunched on the wall. But as you ascend the hill, you realize that the structure's not a castle at all - at least, not any kind of castle you've ever seen before.

Monstrous stone rollers support the entire fortress, giving you the distinct impression that the whole thing is a gigantic war wagon. Smoke rises lazily from blackened stacks, spreading a foul, familiar stench that confirms our point, at least - the juggernaut is created and manned by the foul, some baatezu.

Four miles outside of Malatanni, the *Relentless* waits for the return of its warring troops. The mobile fortress rests in an old, unused strip mine that's turned the entire area into a slate gray wasteland. Everything that touches the ground gets stained with a gritty substance similar to pencil lead.

The pit fiend Lydzin hopes for a quick victory in Malatanni. She figures that rounding up deserters and fugitives can only make her look better when she finally rolls into Nessus, the ninth layer, with the kidnaped Maeldur. But she's worried that the attack on the city might tie up her forces for a long time, or even endanger her prize. That's bad news for the PCs, because Lydzin's preparing to call the troops back at any moment. Worse, she's even more peery than usual about possible intruders.

As soon as the PCs get within 200 yards of the *Relentless*, they must approach with caution and stealth, or risk alerting the baatezu of their presence. The two metal ramps are down, because Lydzin ordered Grunsh and Wragg - fire giants who keep hell



hound kennels below deck — to exercise the beasts. By the time the PCs reach the area, the pack is already returning. The heroes watch one giant and eight hounds ascend the ramps just before they're raised. (Fire giant and hell hound statistics appear in the "Going Below Deck" section, below.)

The PCs might try to sneak onto one of the ramps before they're fully raised. But unless the characters are disguised, invisible, *polymorphed*, or supremely stealthy, they're spotted by the barbazu guards at the gate. Fly spells or similar methods of travel can get the PCs over the battlements of the deck, but they almost certainly draw the notice of tower guards — particularly those in the air defense tower. The hard truth is that the PCs probably won't be able to fight their way onto the *Relentless* without an army.

If the heroes have the means, a simpler way to get on board is to use a *disintegrate*, *passwall*, *teleport*, or any similar spell to bypass the walls of the fortress from the ground. Most likely, they end up in one of the many chambers that lie below deck.

In any case, once the PCs get inside the fortress, they're not likely to waltz around on deck, in full view of the many guards and archers. Humans and humanoids aren't unknown on the *Relentless*, so the heroes won't automatically be scragged on sight. But the PCs shouldn't spend any more time on board than they have to.

The party has three possible courses of action: explore the castle, go below deck, or approach the Maeldur.

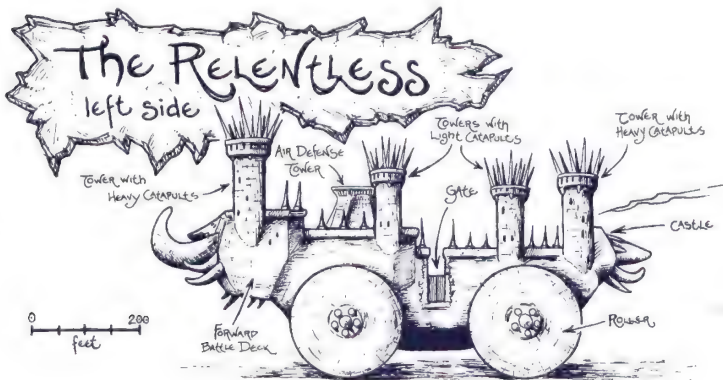
EXPLORING THE CASTLE

If the PCs are looking for the leader of the *Relentless*, or the dark of why it's got the Maeldur, they've come to the right place. The castle is immaculately clean and organized, with fine carpets on the floors, rich paintings on the walls, and braziers of incense burning in every well-ventilated room. Every day, lemures from below deck come to clean the castle. Thus, the PCs have a 25% chance of meeting 1d6 lemures working in any given room (in addition to any other possible occupants).

The castle contains a number of armories, storerooms, barracks, and common areas, as marked on the map of the structure's interior (see page 85).

A (ARMORY). The armories of the castle are for the use of fiends stationed within. The weapons are well-cared for, and organized in orderly rows and containers. The PCs can find saw-toothed glaives, iron javelins, long barbed whips, heavy crossbows, and crossbow bolts. All weapons are either of +1 or +2 enchantment (forged on Baator).

S (STOREROOM). Lydzin considers herself more refined than her fellow pit fiends. She enjoys the finer things in life, and nowhere is that more obvious than in the storerooms of the castle. Wines, gourmet foods, silk clothing — the chambers hold neatly stacked supplies of the highest quality.



These areas are home to 10+1d6 elite barbazu (see above for full statistics, except that these fiends have 50 hp each and carry +1 or +2 weapons). Like every other room of the castle, the barracks are clean and tidy. Each barbazu has a wooden bed, an iron locker, and a fine wooden chair. If the PCs search for jink, they find 10d20 gp worth of coins in each barracks.

Course, the rooms aren't empty; 1d12 barbazu are present at any given time. These baatezu are elite warriors, but they're not the brightest fiends on the plane. They'll chase intruders out of their barracks, but they'll pursue only if commanded to do so by Lydzin, her gelugon adviser, or her cornugon guards.

[10 CORNUGON BARRACKS] Lydzin has a personal guard of 18 cornugons, and they live three to a room. Like the barbazu barracks, the rooms are neat and orderly. Each cornugon has its own bed, table, set of chairs, iron chest, and shelf for displaying war trophies (heads, weapons, shields, and so on). Every chest contains 10d100 gp worth of coins. Many of the tables hold crude, unfinished crafts; Lydzin encourages her close servants to participate in the arts.

These top-shelf fiends have 60 hp each and carry +1 or +2 weapons (for full cornugon statistics, see "Underneath Malatanni," page 76). Their only function is to serve as Lydzin's personal guard. Thus, if she hasn't called them to her side, the PCs find three cornugons in each barracks. The guards are fairly canny, and act intelligently if the fortress or castle is obviously under attack or if Lydzin may be threatened.

[10 MANS-CELLS] These chambers have long tables and benches where the barbazu gather to eat or talk (the cornugons usually eat in their quarters). A small kitchen area's tucked in the side of each hall. The rooms are more or less clean, though the PCs have a 50% chance to see bloody utensils and dishes in a basin awaiting washing.

1. ENTRY HALL

When the PCs enter the castle through the doors on the deck, they step into the entry hall. Read:

The doors leading into — and, as you quickly note, out of — this room are twin valves of hammered bronze, each embossed with an unrecognizable sigil. Obviously meant to impress, the opulent entry hall is carpeted with a plush purple rug, and the walls are splashed with coordinated wall murals. In the center of room stand two smooth, round marble pillars, stretching majestically upward to the ceiling.

Then you notice the room's inhabitants, who aren't nearly as inviting as the fine chamber itself. Ten bearded, fierce-looking warriors stand ready, gripping serrated edge-pole arms. Their stern faces reveal little, except perhaps a just-for-blond-and-bath.

The ten barbazu are elite troops (as found in the castle's barracks). Stationed in the entry hall, they have orders to kill any unescorted intruder.

[10 REAL CHAIRS] The sigil on the doors is Lydzin's personal symbol; it has no magical power.

2. GRAND HALL

When the PCs pass through the double doors at the back of the entry hall, read:

This chamber is as grand as it is horrific. An immense room stretches out before you, its floor made of a material as transparent as glass. Farther into the room, a large throne — also made of the glasslike substance — sits atop a raised dais.

Through the clear floor, you can see a room far below this one, a vast, machinery-laden chamber full of insectlike ends. The disgusting creatures seem to be torturing humans and demihumans strapped down to long tables. Their in-measurably-rile deeds were, until now, unmeasurable to you.

The Grand Hall is Lydzin's throne room, the chamber where she receives and entertains her guests. Luckily for the PCs, there's a good chance that the pit fiend is taking care of business elsewhere in the fortress (or perhaps in her personal quarters). If Lydzin is here, it's likely that all 18 of her cornugon guards are at her side, flanking her throne in two rows of nine.

3. GALLERY

Although the entire castle is decorated with fine art, the gallery boasts particularly valuable paintings and sculptures purchased or stolen from nearly every plane. The room contains 120 works of art, each worth 1d10x1,000 gp to collectors and aficionados.

WRONG
WITH THE PASADENA SCENE.
I DON'T KNOW
IF THIS IS THE CARNAGE HEAP
OR THE ROW OF HEADS
ON PILES
— LYDZIN,
CONSIDERING HER
LATEST PAINTING

6. JEIRD'S QUARTERS

This chamber is the home of Lydzin's advisor, a gelugon wizard named Jeird-athaca. When the PCs enter, read:

A chill grips your body like a clenched fist as you open the door. The temperature in the room beyond seems below zero. Just seconds after the door's opened, a huge, white serpentine head pokes through the archway and looses a deafening roar!

Jeird-athaca used his *advanced illusion* ability to create the image of the white dragon to scare off intruders. Moments after the illusory dragon bellows, an *unseen servant* slams the door closed. (These protections are activated whether the gelugon is present or not.)

If the PCs make it into the room, they discover that the cold temperature is no illusion. The chamber is a frozen cavern; long icicles hang from the ceiling, and a foot of ice covers all surfaces.

Jeird-athaca's possessions are stored — and partially visible — within a mass of translucent ice. If the PCs melt or break into the ice, they find several tomes of magical lore and theory, as well as a spellbook containing a few 1st-, 2nd-, 3rd-, and 4th-level wizard spells. The ice also holds three scrolls: the first has *grease* and *dig* (x2); the second has *move earth* (x2); and the third has *transmute rock to mud* and *disintegrate*. Jeird-athaca received the scrolls when he was assigned to the *Relentless*. They're to be used to free the mobile fortress if it ever gets stuck, but the gelugon's never had to wield their magic yet.

Jeird-athaca is an 8th-level ice wizard, a specialist (similar to an elemental) found only among gelugons. He gains one extra cold-related spell per level, and all of his cold-related spells are harder to resist (the target suffers a -1 penalty to the saving throw). Jeird-athaca can study until he becomes an 11th-level wizard, but his choice of specialty prevents him from ever learning any fire-related spells.

Jeird-athaca (baatezu — gelugon): AC -3; MV 15; HD 11; hp 64; THACO 9 (7 with Str); #AT 4; Dmg 1d4+4/1d4+4/2d4+4/3d4+4 (claw/claw/pincers/tail, Str); SA tail freeze, fear, spell-like powers; SD regeneration, +2 or better weapons to hit; MR 50%; SZ H (12' tall); ML champion (16); Int genius (18); AL LE; XP 21,000.

Notes: Jeird-athaca can direct each of his four attacks at different foes. The gelugon is an 8th-level wizard, and has Strength 18/76 (+2, +4).

SA—victim struck by tail must save vs. paralyzation or be frozen with cold for 1d6 rounds.

SA—radiates fear in a 10-foot radius (victim must save vs. rod/staff/wand or flee for 1d6 rounds).

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illusion*, *animate dead*, *charm person*, *detect invisibility* (always active), *detect magic*, *fly*, *gate* (2d6 barbasu [50% chance, 1/day], 2d4 osyluths [35% chance, 1/day], and 1d2 gelugons [20% chance, 1/day]), *infravision*, *know alignment* (always active), *polymorph self*, *suggestion*, *teleport without error*, and *wall of ice*.

SD—regenerates 2 hp/round.

Personality: Haughty, imperious, confident, quick to anger.

Spells (4/3/3/2)*: 1st—*alarm*, *chill touch*, *reduce* (reverse of *enlarge*), *magic missile*, *unseen servant*; 2nd—*blindness*, *darkness* 15' radius, *freezing sphere* (cold equivalent of *flaming sphere*), *invisibility*; 3rd—*dispel magic*, *coldball* (cold equivalent of *fireball*), *haste*, *lightning bolt*; 4th—*re-opened gate* (see *The Dark of the War* for details), *ice storm*, *stoneskin*.

* gains one extra cold-related spell per level.

LYDZIN'S QUARTERS

This chamber, located above the gallery (area 3), isn't shown on the map. It's 100 feet long and 40 feet wide, taking up the entire upper floor of the castle. The room has beautiful decor throughout, including fine couches, chairs, tables, and shelves loaded with works of art.

Lydzin spends a great deal of time here, painting (canvases of half-finished works fill the room). However, her paintings are tinged with evil, depravity, or torment — not the objects of beauty she loves. Thus, she's never satisfied with her work, blind to the fact that her own fiendish nature keeps her from finding success.

In a locked glass case, Lydzin keeps her most prized treasures. The display case is trapped; anyone who breaks the glass must successfully save vs. spell or be pulled into one of the broken shards (as with a *mirror of life trapping*). The case contains:

- ◆ a bejeweled crown containing trapped light from the plane of Radiance (worth 20,000 gp);
- ◆ a gigantic uncut diamond from the plane of Mineral (worth 10,000 gp);
- ◆ the horn of a unicorn (worth 1,500 gp);
- ◆ a spinneret from a behilith (worth 2,000 gp);
- ◆ a large crystal vial containing the *changing chaos* stuff of Limbo (value unknown); and



- ◆ the intelligent sword of Nerriade the per, charged with guarding the portals between the planes. The weapon is a *long sword* +3, *frost brand*, +6 vs. *fire-using/dwelling creatures*. It speaks common, is LN in alignment, and has an Intelligence of 15, an ego of 18, and the following special abilities: *confusion* (special purpose power, 2d6 round duration), *detect evil/good* (10-foot radius), *detect invisible objects* (120-foot radius), and *detect magic* (10-foot radius).

A large desk in the room is covered with neat stacks of well-ordered reports, and contains drawers filled with precisely organized files. Most documents are records of every path traveled and battle fought by the *Relentless*, every

order given by Lydzin, and complete details of the fortress's staff, forces, layout, and operation.

A few of the files in the drawers contain papers made from skin — letters between Lydzin and her high-ups. If the PCs spend time reading the letters, they learn the following:

The forces of the *Relentless* recently stormed a yugoloth fortress on Gehenna, intending to crush mercenaries suspected of working for the tanar'ri. Scores of lesser yugoloths fought back (and died), while a handful of arcanaloths fled.

In the fortress, the baatezu found a huge creature that obviously had great (but unknown) power. The lawful fiends couldn't communicate with the leviathan or gain any kind of response. Lydzin's high-ups ordered her to bring the creature to Nessus, the lowest layer of Baator.

But the *Relentless* would have taken too long to roll to a gate to Nessus. Lydzin was ordered to return to Baator immediately, and then make the journey to the ninth layer from there (for safety's sake). What's more, the pit fiend was told to replace the bulk of her lemuris and nupperibos with osyluths (to guard the fortress through Baator).

Depending on how the PCs boarded the *Relentless* and made their way to Lydzin's quarters, the pit fiend may or may not be present when they arrive. However, her bezekira, Nightdeath, is always in the chamber, and the hellcat attacks any intruders.

Nightdeath (bezekira): AC -6; MV 15; HD 7+2; hp 37; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4+1/1d4+1/2d6 (claw/claw/bite); SD near-invisible, magical weapons to hit, immune to mind-affecting spells; SW holy items; MR 20%; SZ L (7' long); ML elite (13); Int average (9); AL LE; XP 5,000.

SD—nearly invisible in light (though the creature's outline glows in darkness).

SD—struck only by magical weapons, though pluses of enchantment inflict no additional damage.

SW—holy water and *bless* spells inflict 1d8 points of damage; holy items keep bezekira at bay.

Lydzin (baatezu — pit fiend): AC -5; MV 15, Fl 24 (C); HD 13; hp 77; THACO 7 (4 with Str); #AT 6; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d6/1d6/2d6/2d4 (wing/wing/claw/claw/bite/tail) — one claw attack can be replaced by 2d4+9 (*morning star* +3, Str); SA fear, bite, tail constriction, spell-like powers; SD regeneration, +3 or better weapons to hit; MR 50%; SZ L (12' tall); ML fearless (20); Int genius (18); AL LE; XP 22,000.

Notes: Lydzin has Strength 18/00 (+3, +6).

SA—radiates *fear* in a 20-foot radius; victim must save vs. rod/staff/wand at -3 or flee for 1d10 rounds.

SA—bite transmits poison (victim must save or die in 1d4 rounds) and disease (no save allowed).

SA—if tail hits, it constricts victim for 2d4 additional points of damage per round until victim breaks free with a successful Strength check.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illusion*, *animate dead*, *charm person*, *detect magic*, *detect invisibility*, *fireball*, *gate* (2 lesser or 1 greater baatezu; 100% chance; 1/round), *hold person*, *improved invisibility*, *infravision*, *know alignment* (always active), *polymorph self*, *produce flame*, *pyrotechnics*, *suggestion*, *symbol of pain* (1/day, victim must save vs. rod or suffer -4 on attack rolls and -2 on Dexterity for 2d10 rounds), *teleport without error*, *wall of fire*, and *wish* (1/year).

SD—regenerates 2 hp/round.

Personality: aloof, sophisticated, calculating, slow to anger.

Special Equipment: *morning star* +3 (forged on Baator), *brooch of shielding*.

GOING BELOW DECK

The labyrinthine catacombs that lie below the main deck of the *Relentless* aren't mapped in this adventure. The PCs can reach the area through the hatches on the deck or by using magic to pass through the outer wall of the fortress.

"Below deck" consists of one to six layers, depending on whether a body's over a roller or not. Toward the forward section of the *Relentless*, the PCs find barracks, armories, storerooms, and kennels. The same kinds of rooms lie in the rear of the fortress as well, but that section also contains the engines that turn the rollers.

Every third round spent below deck, the PCs have a 10% chance of encountering 1d2 barbazus guards or 2d4 lemuris workers (see above for statistics). If the party is below deck when the invading army returns from Malatanni, the place suddenly crawls with baatezu. The PCs run into 1d4 osyluths, barbazus, or abishai every round. They'd better be prepared to hide, lie, or bluff.

BARRACKS. The barracks normally house approximately 5,000 lemuris and nupperibos, as well as 800 barbazus and 400 abishai (in addition to those that make up the fortress's standard defenders). Currently, however, the lemuris and nupperibos have been replaced by 900 osyluths.

When the PCs arrive, they find most of the barracks empty. The majority of the osyluths, barbazus, and abishai were sent to attack Malatanni.

Next to each barracks is a large, well-equipped armory.

ARMORIES. These huge chambers contain swords, maces, glaives, crossbows (heavy and light), crossbow quarrels, spears, javelins, and stones for the catapults. The weapons are not enchanted, and number in the thousands.

STOREROOMS. These rooms contain the supplies needed to run the fortress, including food, water, tools, cloth, stone and mortar for repairs, and much more.

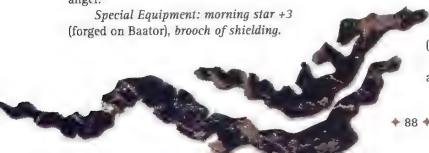
KENNELS. Four kennels lie below deck, each home to 20 hell hounds. The baatezu use the creatures as hunting dogs, scouts, and supplemental attack units. Each kennel contains one pack leader with 7 Hit Dice, five hounds with 6 Hit Dice, five with 5 Hit Dice, and nine with 4 Hit Dice.

What's more, one fire giant lives with the hounds in each kennel. The four giants care for, protect, train, and command the beasts.

Hell hound (80): AC 4; MV 12; HD 4-7; hp 36, 28, 22, or 16; THACO 17 (4 HD), 15 (5-6 HD), or 13 (7 HD); #AT 1;

Dmg 1d10 (bite); SA breathe fire; SD surprise, keen senses, immune to fire; SZ M (4'-6' long); ML elite (13); Int low (6); AL LE; XP 420 (4 HD), 650 (5 HD), 975 (6 HD), or 1,400 (7 HD).

SA—can breathe fire up to 10 yards; flame inflicts damage equal to hound's Hit Dice (victim can save vs. breath



weapon for half damage). On an attack roll of 20, hound bites and breathes fire at victim in the same round.

SD—surprised only on a roll of 1 or 2 on a d10; foes make surprise rolls with a -5 penalty.

SD—detects hidden/invisible creatures 50% of the time.

Fire giant (4): AC -1 (banded mail, helmet); MV 12; HD 15 + 2-5; hp 92, 78, 72, 60; THACO 5 (1 with Str); #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (flsts) or 2d10+10 (giant two-handed sword, Str); SA hurl rocks; SD immunity; SZ H (18' tall); ML champion (15); Int low (7); AL LE; XP 8,000 each.

Notes: Fire giant has Strength 22 (+4, +10).

SA—can hurl rocks from 3 to 200 yards, causing 2d10 points of damage to target.

SD—immune to nonmagical fire; magical fire inflicts -1 point of damage per die.

THE RELENTLESS: The *Relentless* is moved by magic. The engines that drive the rollers are powered by the pain of sods tortured in this room. It's a single vast chamber with a glasslike ceiling, making the area visible from room 2 of the castle above (the Grand Hall). Victims are strapped to long steel tables and tormented by a staff of 20 kocrachons.

To keep the fortress in motion, the kocrachons must torture at least 10 victims at all times. If the PCs want to stop the *Relentless*, they must free the prisoners or kill the beetlelike fiends. Ironically, even the wounds suffered by the PCs in a battle with the kocrachons would keep the fortress moving for a while.

The fiends try to keep their victims alive as long as possible, but most sods can't take extended bouts of constant pain for long. Those who end up in the dead-book get tossed into a huge furnace connected to the smokestacks above deck. (The furnace flames also help power certain aspects of the engines.)

The engines themselves are gigantic conglomerations of iron gears, pistons, and other spinning, grinding parts. When the *Relentless* is in motion, the sound of the engines is deafening - folks in the engine room must communicate without speech. Only an extremely lawful being (such as a baatezu or a modron) can figure out how the machinery works.

Behind the engine room is a filthy holding cell for prisoners not yet needed. The cell can hold up to 100 captives (albeit uncomfortably), though when the PCs arrive it contains only 3d8 sods, including tieflings, bariaur, githzerai, githyanki, half-elves, and a few lesser tanar'ri (mostly cambions and bar-igural).

When the PCs enter this chamber, show the players the picture of the engine room on page 16 of *Visions of War*.



Kocrachon (20): AC 2 (0 from behind); MV 12, Fl 12 (D); HD 6+6; hp 41 each; THACO 13; #AT 3 or 2; Dmg 1d6/1d6/2d6 (claw/claw/bite) or 1d8/1d8 (scalpel); SA *cause pain, cause disease*.

spell-like powers; SD +1 or better weapons to hit; SZ M (5' tall); ML elite (14); Int high (13); AL LE; XP 5,000 each.

SA—can forgo all other attacks in a round

to *cause pain* in foe; victim must save vs. spell at -6 or suffer -4 to attack/damage rolls, lose 2 levels of AC, and lose 3 from movement rate (effects last for 2d6 rounds). Kocrachon must first spend three rounds studying foe's weaknesses.

SA—can *cause disease* (3/day, as per the spell) by biting foe and holding on for three rounds (a successful bend bars roll detaches the kocrachon). Victim dies in 1d3 weeks. The kocrachon can choose to transmit a healing fluid (heals 1d12 points of damage) instead of disease.

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, infravision, know alignment* (always active), *suggestion*, and *teleport without error*.

◆ THE MAELDUR ◆

At some point, the PCs probably check out the Maeldur in the filthy pool on the main deck of the *Relentless*.

As the PCs approach the behemoth, show the players the picture of the Maeldur on page 17 of *Visions of War*.

Read the following:

Near the center of this huge fortress is a rectangular pool about 150 feet long and 100 feet wide. The water is foul and black, and you can't tell how deep it is.

Backing up almost the entire length and width of the trough, is a creature of misshapen form and warped flesh. It's not rubbery skin the color of old, undercooked meat. Its body is covered with fleshy pseudopods that hang limp. Strange organs that seem useless and dead, and dozens of bulbous, watery eyes that appear to see nothing.

If the PCs recognize the creature as the Maeldur - the object of their quest - they might try to use the *ruulge* to communicate with it. If so, the leviathan can hear the strange speech trickling out of the gem, but just barely. It lifts a pseudopod, beckoning the heretics to come closer.

No matter how close the PCs stand, though, the only way for them to be heard and understood by the Maeldur is

to climb onto its body. The behemoth tries to get them to stand on its center (as the baernaloth Daru Ib Shamiq used to). If the PCs oblige, they see the most disturbing sight of all.

The wet flesh under your feet squeaks like slippery ribber as you climb onto the beast. Pseudopods, eyes, and useless limbs and organs hang limply all around. But at the center of its "back" you find a male humanoid face surrounded – almost suffocated – by folds of fatty skin. The face has a noble bearing, despite the grotesque nature of the creature. Weak pseudopods motion for you to get as close as you can to the face when you speak.

Now the PCs have to convince this ancient, twisted creature – who once soared celestial skies with angelic wings but for eons has been trapped in a hideous form, mindlessly serving the yugoloths – to drop itself into the River Styx and forget everything. They can try to appeal to its innate goodness, but centuries on the Lower Planes have drained the Maeldur of much of its virtue. (As the book in Sigil's Great Library said, the leviathan knows "things no creature of purity should know.")

The PCs have better luck playing on the Maeldur's sense of guilt and shame. By reminding it of how the yugoloths kidnaped, corrupted, and enslaved it, the heroes might talk the former celestial into wiping away all memory of its tortured past. As an added bonus, the Maeldur will be stripping a power away from the evil fiends it has been forced to teleport.

In any case, the Maeldur can't respond to the party with words, but only strained facial expressions and the occasional weak movement of a pseudopod.

Course, convincing the creature to take a bath in the Styx is only part of the problem. The PCs must also figure out how to get it there. They already know that the Maeldur grants the baatezu and tanar'ri the power to teleport. The *seeding* dream transmitted by the ulroloths hinted that the beast must know the name of any creature to be teleported, and that it does not know its *own* name. Thus, the PCs must tell the behemoth in no uncertain terms that its name is Maeldur Et Kavurik.

Meanwhile, the baatezu on the deck of the *Relentless* are sure to notice what's going on in the pool. At first, only the barbazu guards attack, but before long, abishai and osyluths join the fight. If the PCs take more than eight rounds to deal with the Maeldur, Lydzin and her cornugons attack as well. Hopefully, for the heroes' sake, the Maeldur teleports them away before they fall at the hands of the baatezu.

Maeldur Et Kavurik: AC 7; MV 0; HD 30; hp 215; THACO 5; SD teleport, regeneration, immunities, +4 or better weapons to hit; MR 80%; SZ G (140' long); ML unreliable (4); Int low (6); AL N.

SD—any creature whose name is known by the Maeldur has the "innate" spell-like power to *teleport without error*.

The Maeldur moves the traveler from his original location to his desired location; it cannot refuse to do so.

SD—regenerates 10 hp/round unless slain.

SD—immune to fire, cold, acid, electricity, poison, gas, and iron and silver weapons.

Personality: unimaginably sad.

ESCAPE

As soon as the Maeldur learns its name and is convinced to plunge into the Styx, it teleports itself to the river. If the PCs are in physical contact with the creature at the time – most likely, standing on its back – they're taken along for the ride (no saving throw).

Alternately, the heroes might first give *their* names to the Maeldur, which means that they, too, will be able to *teleport without error* (at least, until the behemoth splashes down in the Styx). If so, they might teleport themselves to the river on their own – or to a completely different destination, anywhere in the multiverse (for details, see "Getting Away," below).

CAPTURE

If the PCs aren't in contact with the Maeldur when it teleports away, fail to tell it their own names first, or – worst of all – don't figure out what to do in time, they're in big trouble. Lydzin orders her troops to capture and torture the heroes to learn what they know about the Maeldur.

If the baatezu discover the true power of the Maeldur and retain possession of the creature, the entire balance of power on the Lower Planes could shift. The DM should give the PCs a shot at a daring escape with the Maeldur to complete their mission.

The heroes' saving grace just might be the tanar'ri. If the PCs let word leak to the Abyss of their quest (perhaps through the night hag Oppinimos Mar or the nalfeshnee Tapheon, if they left him alive), a host of chaotic fiends swarms in to attack the *Relentless*. The tanar'ri hope to capture the Maeldur for themselves. The PCs might be able to escape during the epic battle.

If the Maeldur got away but the heroes didn't, the PCs soon see that the baatezu (and tanar'ri, if they're around) can no longer teleport. The characters may derive satisfaction from knowing that they succeeded in their mission – though perhaps at the cost of their lives.

◆ A+ +THE STYX◆

When the Maeldur teleports to the River Styx, it chooses a spot where the black waters flow through an open plain in Oinos, the first gloom of the Gray Waste. Unfortunately, the leviathan appears high in the air, directly above the river, and simply lets itself fall into the water below (the plunge takes three rounds).

If the PCs are still riding on the Maeldur's back, they'd better find a way off before it hits the river. But the heroes have another problem to worry about: the yugoloths.

STONES AND SWIMMERS

Marraenoloth boatmen have such an innate knowledge of the River Styx that they're instantly aware of the Maeldur's appearance over the water. The yugoloths take advantage of this fact to pinpoint the behemoth's precise location, and immediately send 66 hydroloths to the spot (using their soon-to-be-lost *teleport without error* ability). The fiends' mission: collect the memories loosed from the Maeldur as it's immersed in the dark river.

See, most folks don't know that when the Styx takes a body's memories, it stores them. The memories congeal into tiny gray stones (known as the *sediment of thought*) that slowly sink to the bottom of the river bed. And the hydroloths — immune to the memory-draining power of the water — can simply swim down and collect the stones.

The ultroloths believe that the Maeldur knows many lost secrets of the ancient baernaloths. They hope that the Styx'll suck that knowledge out and store it in the *sediment of thought*. The master fiends're working on a way to read the thoughts packed into each stone — such chant might prove to be very useful.

In addition to collecting the *sediment of thought*, the hydroloths have orders to kill the PCs. The heroes are a loose end, and yugoloths hate loose ends. Besides, the sods might have accidentally tumbled to the secret involvement of the 'loths in the whole affair.

The bulk of the hydroloths wait in the river to gather the stones, but one fiend for each PC breaks away to attack the characters. If the heroes are on the Maeldur's back, the hydroloths use their *dimension door* ability to appear in the air and then glide down to slay the PCs.

Hydroloth (1 per PC): AC -2; MV 6, Glide 12 (E), Sw 24; HD 7+14; hp 43 each; THACO 13; #AT 3 or 5; Dmg 1d8/1d8/1d10 (claw/claw/bite) or that plus 1d4/1d4 (claw/claw); SA sleep; SD immunity, +1 or better weapons to hit; MR 40%; SZ L (10' tall); ML elite (13); Int average (9); AL NE; XP 14,000 each.

Notes: On the ground, a hydroloth can fight with two front claws and a bite (3 attacks); while gliding, it can also slash with its rear claws (5 attacks).

SA—can spit a stream of liquid that inflicts 1d10 points of damage; victim must also save vs. poison or fall asleep for 1d8 rounds (can't be awakened except by magic).

SA—has the following spell-like powers: *alter self, animate dead, cause disease* (reverse of *cure disease*), *charm person, conjure elemental* (12 HD, fights uncontrolled, only near water), *create water, darkness 15' radius, dimension door, gate* (1 hydroloth; 50% chance; 2/day), *improved phantasmal force, produce flame, teleport without error, and water walk* (as per the ring).

SD—suffers half damage from water-based attacks (none if save is successful).

THE FIENDISH CAVALRY

Earlier in the adventure, the PCs might have inadvertently let the baatezu or tanar'ri learn of their mission. If so, it all comes crashing down on the heroes now.

Through scrying and other magic, the involved fiends (whether baatezu, tanar'ri, or both) have, by now, tumbled to the dark of the party's goal. Realizing that they have to stop the PCs from erasing the Maeldur's memories, they send powerful flying fiends to intercept the behemoth's fall. If baatezu, 10 cornugons and 30 black abishai arrive; if tanar'ri, 23 vrocks appear.

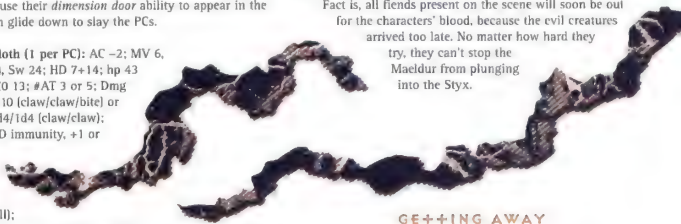
Either way, the flyers try to divert the path of the Maeldur so it won't fall into the Styx. They realize it might not survive a crash onto the hard, rocky terrain, but they're willing to take the chance — if the Maeldur hits the river, they'll lose their power to teleport anyway.

The PCs get a clue as to why the fiends have shown up just in time to try to stop the Maeldur. On the banks of the river, they see two fiends (either red abishai or babaus) standing alongside the "informant" (the night hag from *Torch*, or perhaps even a fiend who'd been approached by the heroes themselves). Naturally, the three new arrivals would like to rip into the PCs.

Fact is, all fiends present on the scene will soon be out for the characters' blood, because the evil creatures arrived too late. No matter how hard they try, they can't stop the Maeldur from plunging into the Styx.

GETTING AWAY

Until the Maeldur hits the water, the PCs can escape quite easily, assuming they tell it their names (either back in the *Relentless* or as they're falling through the air). Essentially, for a few moments, the heroes have the innate ability to *teleport without error*. As soon as the PCs are sure that the Maeldur is going to fall into the Styx despite fiendish interference, they should teleport away to a safe location.





suffer
10d6
points of
falling damage when it
hits the river
(the damage is
half of the normal
maximum
because they're
falling into deep
water). What's more,
the sods lose their
memories to the Styx;
those who successfully
save vs. spell forget only
the past day, while those
who fail the roll suffer
total amnesia.

Either way, the PCs
must also contend with the
fiends, who're burning to see
the meddling heroes meet a terrible,
gruesome end. Fortunately, the
monsters no longer have the ability to
teleport; the PCs might be able to escape
if they can flee with enough speed.

If the player characters get away from the
fiends, they should eventually find a gate out of
the Gray Waste (though it might entail an extended
stay on the plane – an unpleasant proposition at best).
Sooner or later, they no doubt crawl back home (presumably,
to Sigil).

SLEEPING THE BLINDS: The PCs can't teleport directly back
to Sigil; the only way in or out of the Cage is through one of
its portals.

The DM
should force any
teleporting character to
announce his destination
without giving him much time
for thought (and without letting the
players consult one another). After all,
the PCs are riding the Maeldur as it crashes
toward the water, and they don't have time for
lengthy discussions or planning. Their choices should
prove interesting. The PCs can go anywhere in the entire
multiverse – where will they go if forced to decide quickly?

If the heroes don't (or can't) teleport away, they'd better
have the power to fly off of the Maeldur. Otherwise, they

◆ WRAPPING UP ◆

On the planes, things have a strange way of going from
frantic to dead calm in the blink of an eye. That's the case
now – once the PCs escape the deluge of fiends, things get
quiet. A few days pass. Then rumors begin to circulate
throughout the gate-towns of the Outlands, burghs all over
the planes, and, of course, Sigil. It seems the fiends have lost
their ability to traverse the multiverse at will. Few berks (if
any) see that as a bad development.

If the PCs stuck around in Oinos long enough to see the
Maeldur plunge into the Styx, the first thing they spy is a

tremendous splash. Scarcely a moment later, they notice that some of the puddles of oily water that splashed up onto the ground begin to writhe and move (see page 95 for a description of these new monsters, the darklores). Meanwhile, the Maeldur languishes in the putrid river for a few minutes and then disappears. Where it went – and whether it vanished on its own or was stolen away – is unknown. But the crafty yugoloths know what happened to the creature; see “Aftermath: The Fiends,” below, for details.

STOPPING THE BEINGS: The Maeldur won’t comprehend or remember anything it hears while in the water. Thus, even if a power-hungry PC gives his name to the behemoth again, the sod won’t regain the power to teleport.

If the heroes try to use the *vaulge* to find the Maeldur after it disappears, the gem no longer functions. The *vaulge* was linked to the Maeldur by the ancient energies of the baernaloths. Once the leviathan loses its memory, the gem is drained of all magical power.

AFTERMATH: THE HEROES

The player characters will probably find it frustrating that most bashers just won’t believe their story. Those that are convinced, however, are definitely impressed. Eventually, the PCs’ reputations grow and even surpass them; the cutters find themselves praised for even greater deeds than those to which they can truthfully lay claim.

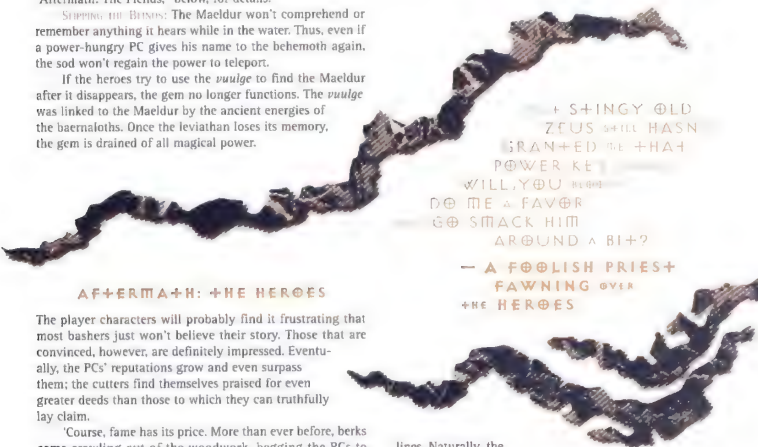
Course, fame has its price. More than ever before, berks come crawling out of the woodwork, begging the PCs to right wrongs, champion lost causes, and do the impossible. Worse, if the fiends know that the characters were responsible for their loss – the yugoloths certainly know, at least – the PCs can expect payback. The baatezu and tanar’ri want to kill the heroes in revenge. The yugoloths just want the pawns silenced. But they all dispatch assassins and other nasty folk to put the PCs in the dead-book. (While the chaotic tanar’ri may eventually lose interest and move on to other matters, the baatezu and the yugoloths certainly won’t give up.)

It’s possible that the thieves’ guilds in Torch (in particular, Tiamat’s Chosen – the guild of Thessol the bariaur) approach the fiends to sell their chant. Assuming that the groups’ spies (especially Thessol) saw enough to put it all together, they can probably give the fiends the identities of the heroes. The rogues might even hire themselves out as assassins.

Finally, many player characters no doubt will insist that, at the start of the adventure, Father Saurive promised

them celestial rewards for a job well done. Well, the good cleric spoke out of turn – he just assumed that glorious rewards would be forthcoming. Bad assumption.

However, if the DM desires, the aasimon and other upper-planar forces could certainly reward the PCs with a boon of some sort. Perhaps they grant a special favor, a bit of secret knowledge, a new spell or magical item, a portal key, a spell key, a power key, or anything else along those



+ STINGY OLD
ZEUS WILL HASN
GRANTED ME THAT
POWER KEY
WILL YOU BE
DO ME A FAVOR
GO SMACK HIM
AROUND A BIT?
— A FOOLISH PRIEST
FAWNING OVER
THE HEROES

lines. Naturally, the ceremony is accompanied by a great deal of celestial fanfare. But, after all, the player characters really do deserve it – they’ve been through a lot.

THE FUTURE OF TORCH: The fact that the PCs have become targets of the fiends can lead to many future adventures. However, the heroes might not want to live with such a threat hanging over their heads. If the PCs press the issue, the DM can offer the following solution: The celestials are willing to use a solar’s *wish* ability to ensure that the characters will never be recognized – by anyone – as the cutters who took teleportation from the fiends.

The PCs must make a tough choice. Do they give up the fame they’ve rightfully earned in order to stay alive? Or do they accept the glory and face the consequences?

AFTERMATH: THE FIENDS

Obviously, this adventure has far-reaching implications on the future of the campaign and the entire PLANESCAPE setting.

The baatezu and tanar'ri no longer have the innate power to *teleport without error*. The loss will alter everything from chance fiend encounters to the way that battles are fought in the Blood War.

Course, some fiends will find ways around the problem. Lower-planar smiths will forge magical items to compensate for the setback. A few creatures can use other innate powers to jaunt about the multiverse – succubi, for example, can *plane shift*. And other solutions, like the darklore (see page 95), may present themselves in time.

For the most part, though, the loss will greatly increase the importance of portals and gates. The fiends might seize gate-towns that lie at the edges of the Lower Planes to ensure control of the gates. The burgs may eventually regain their independence, perhaps involving the PCs in further adventures as they struggle to free an entire city from the clutches of the tanar'ri or baatezu.

The yugoloths, strangely, are particularly quiet. Folks assume that, like the lawful and chaotic fiends, the 'loths have lost their power to teleport. Indeed, they have – but they quickly get it back. See, after the Maeldur plunged into the River Styx, the yugoloths spirited it away to a new hiding place in the deepest layer of Gehenna. There, arcana-loths convinced it to assume the duties of an interplanar guide, and they're still whispering to it the names of every yugoloth in existence. (The Maeldur has no reason not to believe their well-crafted lies – it can't remember anything that happened before it fell into the Styx.)

The 'loths also subtly spread the following chant: They'll return the power to *teleport without error* (so cruelly torn away by the mortals!) to any baatezu or tanar'ri that swears allegiance to the yugoloths. Thus, the neutral evil fiends launch the next phase of their eons-spanning plot, and slowly begin to regain complete domination of the Lower Planes – and all of their inhabitants. It won't come to pass for uncountable mortal generations, but the yugoloths have plenty of time to wait.

Course, the PCs might have thrown a wrench into the plans. If they somehow prevented the Maeldur from being stolen out of the Styx (perhaps by killing the creature while it was still on the *Relentless*), the heroes are enemy number

one to the yugoloths. And once the 'loths pin the blame on the mortals, they're targeted by the baatezu and tanar'ri as well. Attacks and assassination attempts dog their every move for the rest of their lives. Immersing the Maeldur in the Styx would've merely earned them a bottomless pit of fiendish hatred; *slaying* the behemoth makes that fury seem like a drop in the bucket.

The yugoloths will have to create a new creature to control the teleportational matrix. It'll take centuries, if they can do it at all. What's more, the current ultroloth leaders will likely be deposed for this turn of events. But the PCs probably won't realize any of this.

Lastly, if the tanar'ri or baatezu somehow learn that the yugoloths were behind the whole affair (an unlikely event, at best), their opinion of the 'loths will plummet. Fewer and fewer yugoloth mercenaries will find work in the Blood War, and assault teams will target more and more yugoloth bases and burgs. Fact is, the Blood War will become more of a three-way conflict, with the yugoloths on the defensive, hated by all. They'll have to hatch a new plan to restore the old balance – and powers only know what it might be.

STORY AWARDS

In addition to earning experience points for overcoming foes in the adventure, the party (as a group) earns bonus XP for achieving any of the following story goals. Note that some awards depend entirely on the DM's judgment.

Conducting intelligent initial research: 800 XP.
Not alerting the fiends ahead of time: 1,000.
Avoiding combat with the baernaloth: 800.
Freeing captives or slaves (anywhere): 10 each.
Avoiding combat with slaves disguised as tanar'ri: 500.
Obtaining the vulgite: 750.
Getting into the Relentless: 500.
Freeing Nerriade the per: 850.
Helping Nerriade regain his sword: 400.
Convincing the Maeldur to go to the Styx: 1,000.
Telling the Maeldur its name: 300.
Telling the Maeldur the PCs' names: 400.
Escaping by using teleport without error: 1,000.

If the PCs did well, these guidelines should give a party of 4–6 heroes about 1,000–2,000 bonus experience points per character.

DARKLØRE

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Lower Planes
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTION CYCLE:	Any
DM:	Knowledge
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
TREASURY:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral evil
CO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	3
Hit Dice:	6+2
THACO:	15
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1d6
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d6 each
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Absorb or bestow knowledge
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+1 or better weapons to hit, half damage from Type P or S
MAGE RESISTANCE:	20%
SIZE:	L (10 feet wide)
MORALE:	Steady (11)
XP VALUE:	6,000

A darklore is a puddlelike beast formed when the Maeldur Et Kavurk, an ancient creation of the yugoloths, plunged into the River Styx. The size of the behemoth caused much of the foul water to splash up onto the shores — water that had absorbed all of the Maeldur's dark secrets and forbidden knowledge (including the name of every fiend that ever existed). Not even the canniest arcanaloth could've predicted that the puddles would congeal and gain sentience.

A wriggling mass of amorphous flesh, a darklore is blue-gray in color, with dark green veins pulsing just below the surface of its entire body. It can form from one to six tentaclelike pseudopods that can stretch up to eight feet. The creature has no apparent eyes or other features.

COMBAT: A darklore feeds on tainted knowledge, craving the taste of wicked secrets and foul truths. To sate its hunger, it seeks out evil bashers and tries to drain them of dark information.

Any creature struck by one of the darklore's pseudopods suffers 1d6 points of damage. What's more, a victim of evil alignment must make a successful saving throw versus spell or lose one point of Intelligence. If the victim is of neutral alignment, there's a 50% chance that he must make a similar saving throw. Good-aligned victims must make the saving throw only 25% of the time. The only cutters fully immune to the darklore's draining are those with no knowledge of evil, those too pure to possess dark secrets — most likely, folks from the Upper Planes. (Note that they still suffer the 1d6 points of damage.)

Victims completely sapped of Intelligence fall into a coma. Drained Intelligence returns at a rate of one point per week, reaching a maximum of the victim's previous total minus 1d4-1. In other words, 0-3 points of Intelligence are permanently lost.

A darklore can choose to bestow knowledge upon a target, rather than steal it. The monster does so only when fighting foes of good or neutral alignment. During such a battle, a nonevil sod struck by a pseudopod must make a successful saving throw versus spell or suddenly become aware of a dark secret (the attack does *not* confer Intelligence points). The knowledge is so foul that good-aligned victims who fail their saving throw are stunned for 1d2 rounds, unable to perform any action. Neutral creatures are stunned only 50% of the time. Paladins who receive dark knowledge lose their status 1% of the time (an *atonement* spell is required to restore their lost paladinhood).

A Dungeon Master can use a darklore to make a player character aware of certain secrets — or to rob him of facts he shouldn't know. Such tainted knowledge can include the location or key of a gate leading to the Lower Planes, the true name of a fiend, a wrongful deed committed (or planned) by others, details about an evil item or place, and so on. The PC can then act on the knowledge gained, or must carry on with no memory of the stolen secret (unless he relearns it somehow). The change can have an interesting effect on a campaign; often the gain or loss of a single bit of information can shake things up radically.

A darklore has the following spell-like abilities, each usable once per round: *darkness* 15' radius, *detect good/evil*, *detect invisibility*, *clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *infravision*, and *teleport without error*. (Note that the creature's *teleport without error* power is not dependent upon the Maeldur and is not lost when the fiends lose that ability.) A darklore generally uses its spell-like powers to find prey.

Because of its amorphous, almost liquidlike nature, a darklore can ooze through openings as small as 1 inch in diameter. A darklore can be harmed only by weapons of +1 or better enchantment. Of those, piercing and slashing weapons (Types P and S) inflict only half damage.

HABITAT/SOCIETY: Originally spawned in the first layer of the Gray Waste, darklores have since wormed their way across the entire Lower Planes. They seem to retain a link to their source of creation, preferring to stick close to the banks of the River Styx. Nevertheless, they're free to roam wherever they please.

Because the darklores feed on knowledge, they pose little threat to the more leatherheaded residents of the Lower Planes. Even most lesser fiends are just a light snack for the amorphous monsters, and are often passed over in favor of more intelligent prey.

Naturally, greater fiends fear the darklores, but they

prize the creatures as well, for two reasons. First of all, a *charmed* or *controlled* darklore can be commanded to drain others of evil knowledge and then impart those secrets upon its master. Powerful fiends use darklores as insidious, information-gathering spies.

Second of all, it turns out that a darklore retains some of the teleportation matrix ability of the Maeldur, and can teleport a sod if it knows his name. (This fact was only recently discovered by a balor, though by now chant's spread across the Lower Planes.) Thus, a mighty fiend can force a *charmed* darklore to absorb his name, and then can use *teleport without error* at will.

'Course, as a darklore can drain only wicked knowledge, the name must be an evil secret (or part of such a secret). In other words, fiends are just about the only berks who can use this trick. What's more, a fiend who surrenders his name to a darklore loses one point of Intelligence — permanently. And the berk'll have to arrange to reclaim his own name, perhaps simply by writing it down before it's sucked away, commanding a lackey to repeat it, and so on.

Because of the darklores' power to teleport others, the yugoloths have been ordered by their high-ups to kill or capture the pudlelike monsters whenever possible. See, the neutral evil fiends control the Maeldur, and they want the baatezu or tanar'ri to come to *them* for help in regaining the power to teleport.

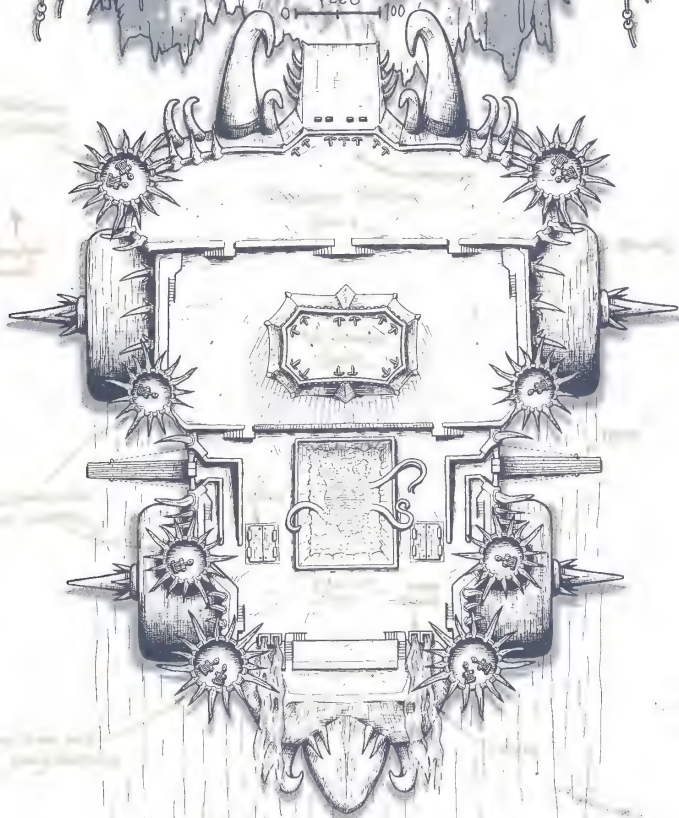
ETIOLOGY: Even by lower-planar standards, the darklore is an abomination — a fluke. Not even the yugoloths who created the Maeldur (or those who engineered its dunking in the River Styx) could have predicted what would happen. The behemoth's strange essence somehow reacted with the foul waters and the nature of the Gray Waste to create the sentient, dangerous creatures. If there's more to their creation — if it wasn't just an accident — no one seems to have the dark of it.

Similarly, it's not known how many darklores were created by the Maeldur's splash, or whether the creatures can reproduce further. But most folks on the planes hope the answers are *few* and *no*.

I'M AS HUNGRY
AS A DARKLORE
ON ELYSIUM

— PLANAR CLICHE





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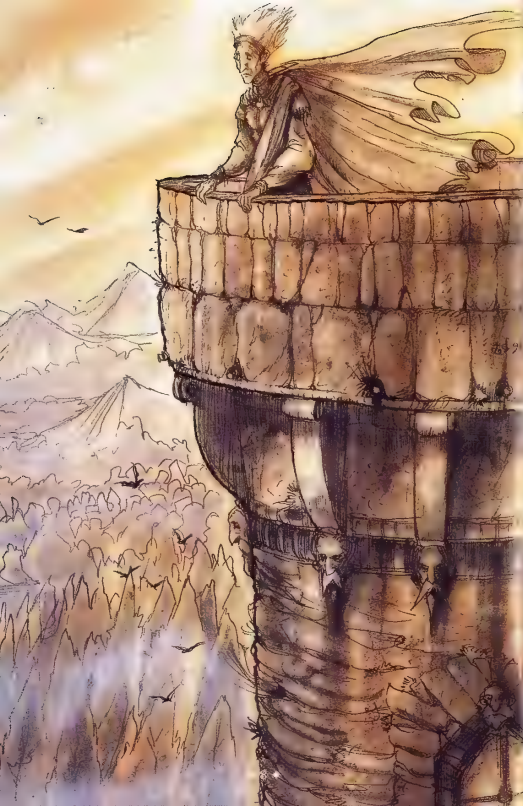
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The Fields of NEFTLES

MILES 0 1 2 3 4 5





the
WHISPERING
GATES

BEWARE THE
GUARDIAN

POOL OF CLEAREST
WATER

THE 348th LAYER
of the ABYSS

THE FORTRESS
of
INDIFFERENCE